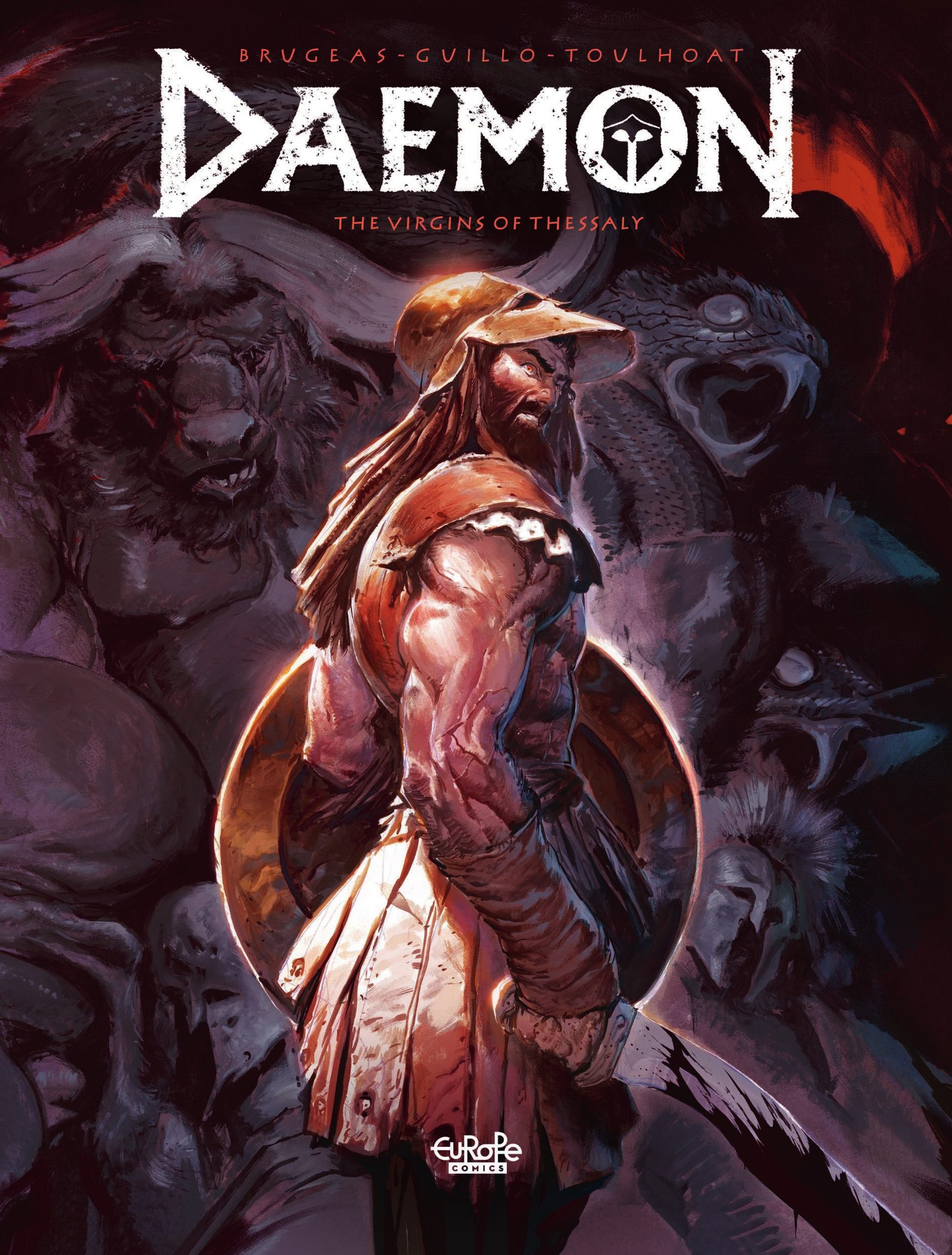
BRUGEAS-GUILLO-TOULHOAT

DAEMON

THE VIRGINS OF THESSALY



DAEMON

VOLUME ONE
THE VIRGINS OF THESSALY

STORY
VINCENT
BRUGEAS

ART & COLORS
YOANN
GUILLO
RONAN
TOULHOAT

EUROPE COMICS

Thanks to Gauthier for lighting this little spark! Daemon owes you a great deal! Thanks to the team at Le Lombard for their enthusiasm and energy. Our series is extremely lucky to have you on its side. And finally, to Ronan and Yoann, the saying "a picture (in color) is worth a thousand words" was written for you!

VINCENT

I've always been fascinated by mythology, and this is the first time I've been able to add color to it and bring it to life. I owe this fulfillment of a childhood dream to Ronan and Vincent. Thanks, guys, for your talent, and, at the risk of repeating myself, thanks again for welcoming me onto your team. Thanks to Gauthier for loving this project as much as we do. Thanks to the entire team at Le Lombard. It's been a pleasure working with you all. Thanks to Anaïs, "the sniper," for all of her preparation and pertinent remarks. Long live Daemon and his friends! Long live comics!

YOANN

Thank you, Vincent. Fantasy is a genre that has appealed to me ever since I learned how to read. Adding my own contribution from a mythological perspective is therefore something of a personal accomplishment for me. After reading the original script for the very first time, I told Vincent that he had written a true gem. So thanks to Fred Vignaux for preferring Thorgal to Daemon and thus giving me a chance to fully express myself on this book. And thanks to Yoann for enhancing my (0.5mm-sized) trowel-drawn pages with such elegance. Thank you, Gauthier, for believing in this project from the very beginning. Long live Daemon, Kallista, Eugenios, and, of course, Diomedes!

RONAN

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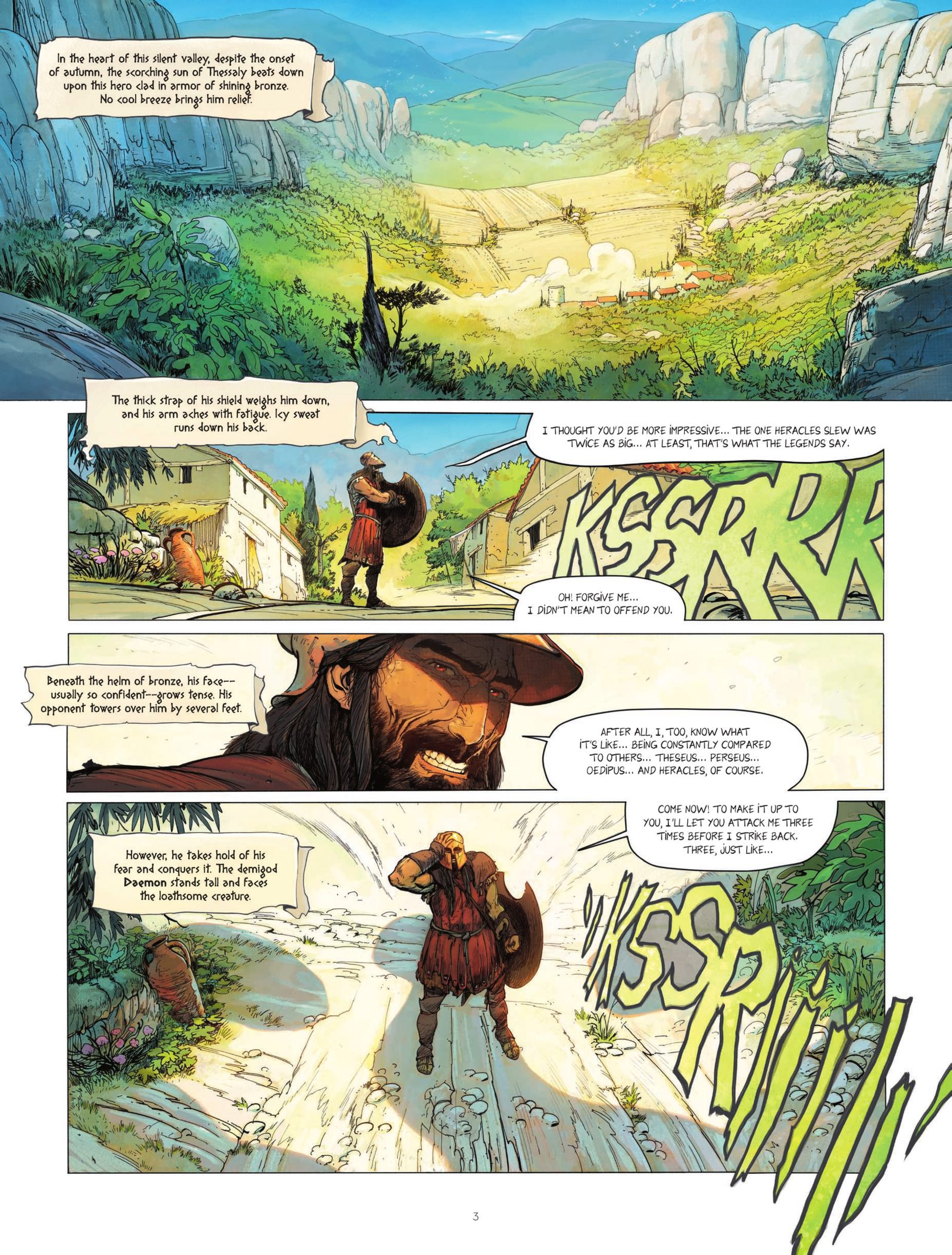
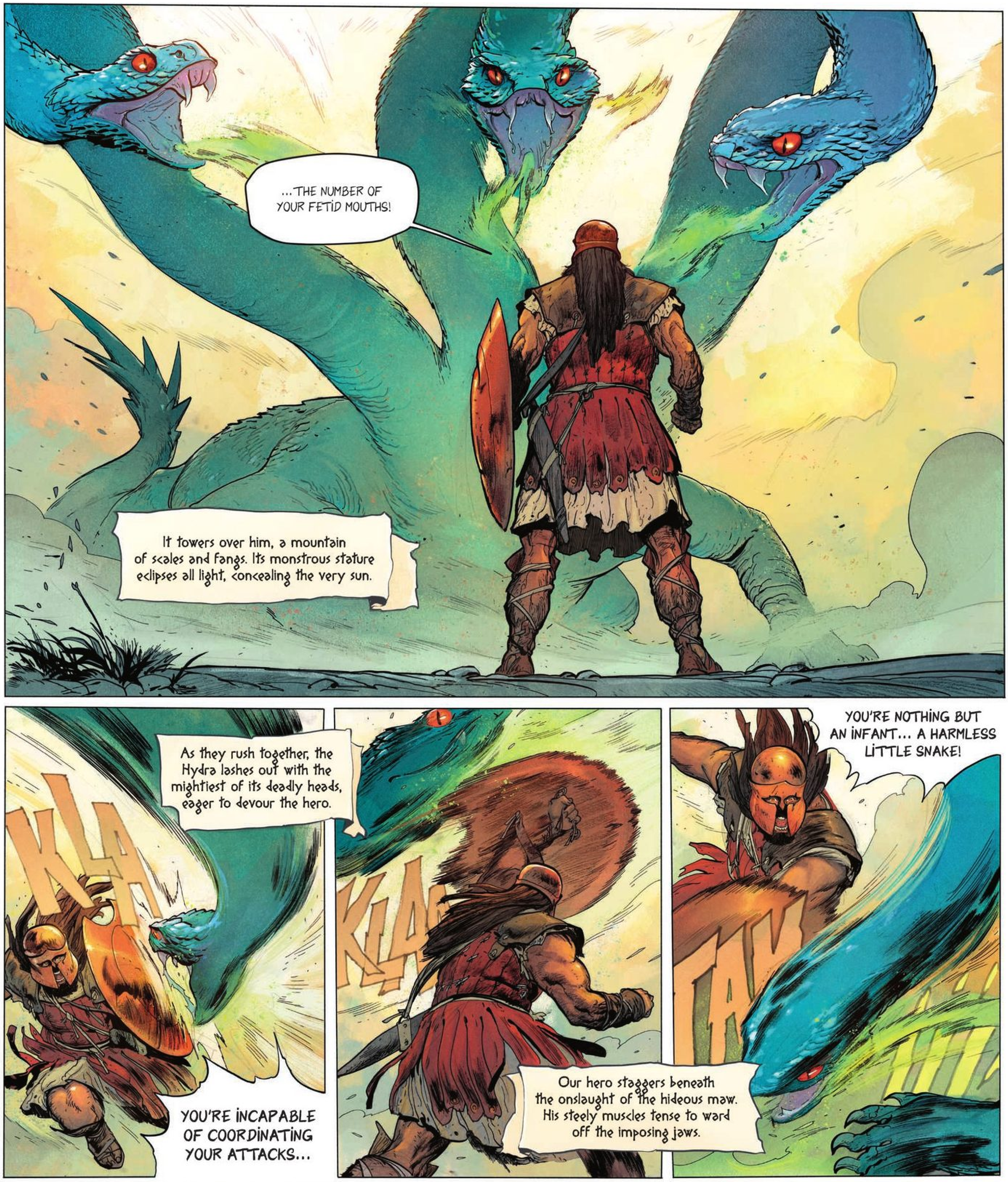
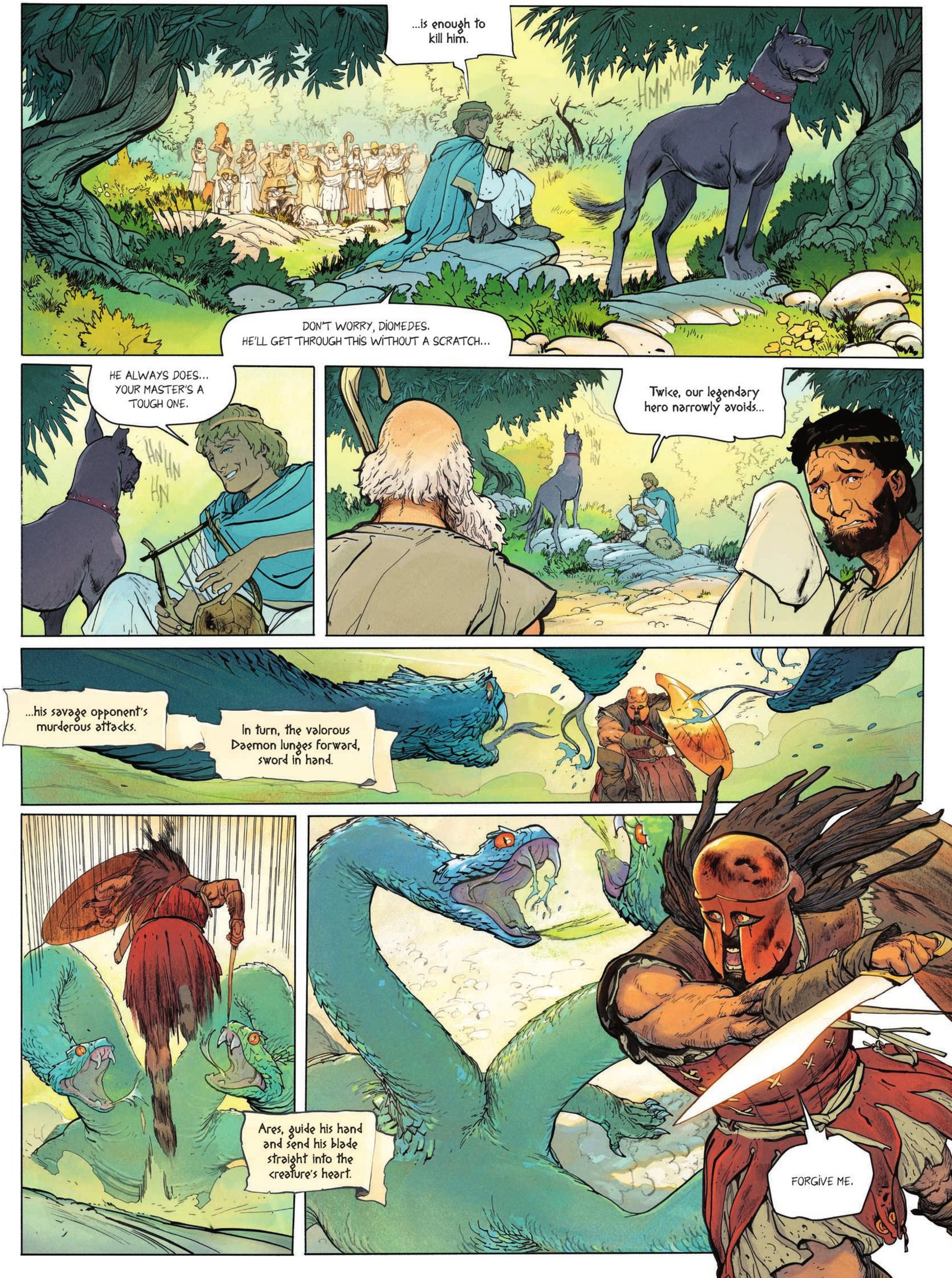
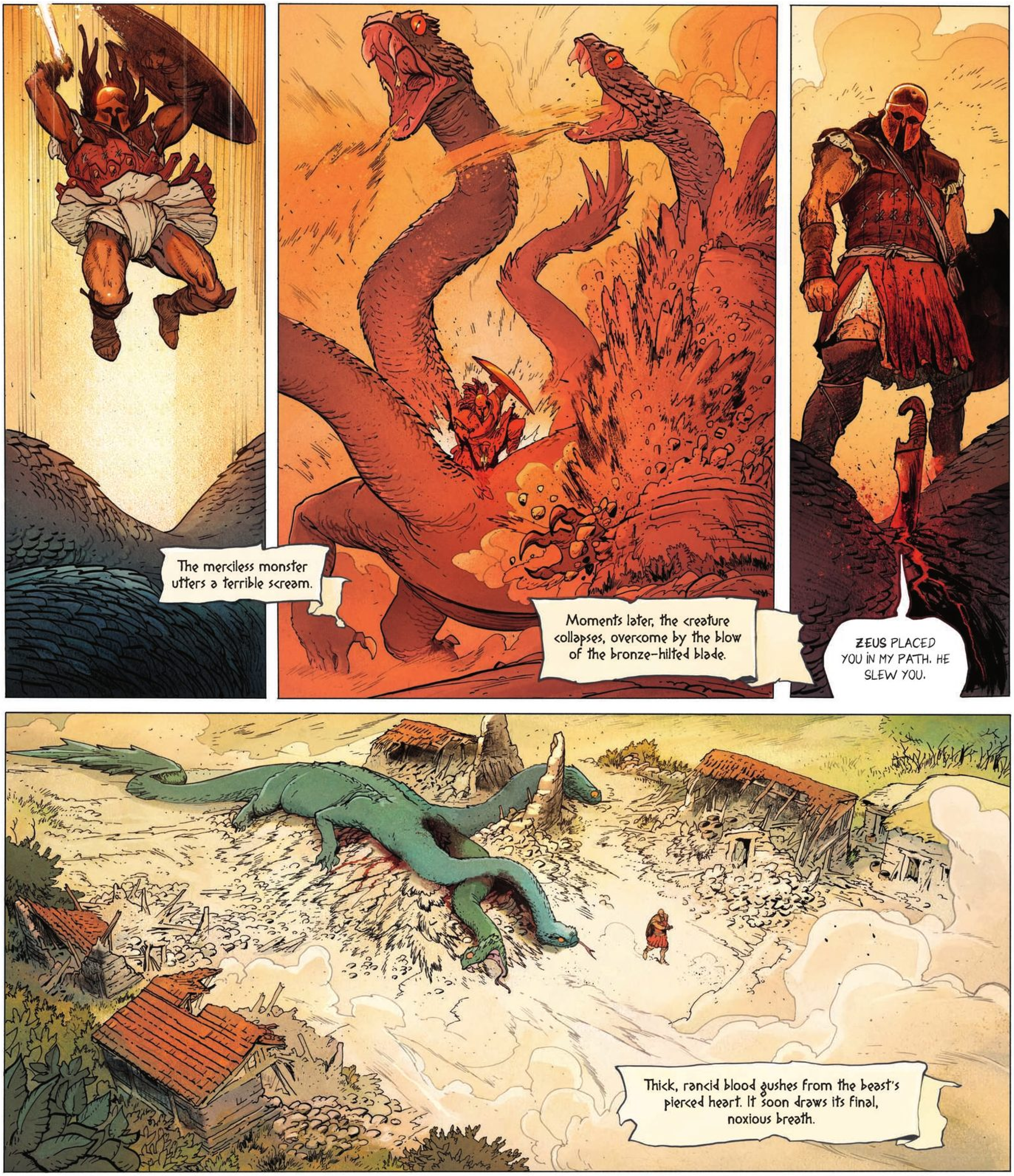
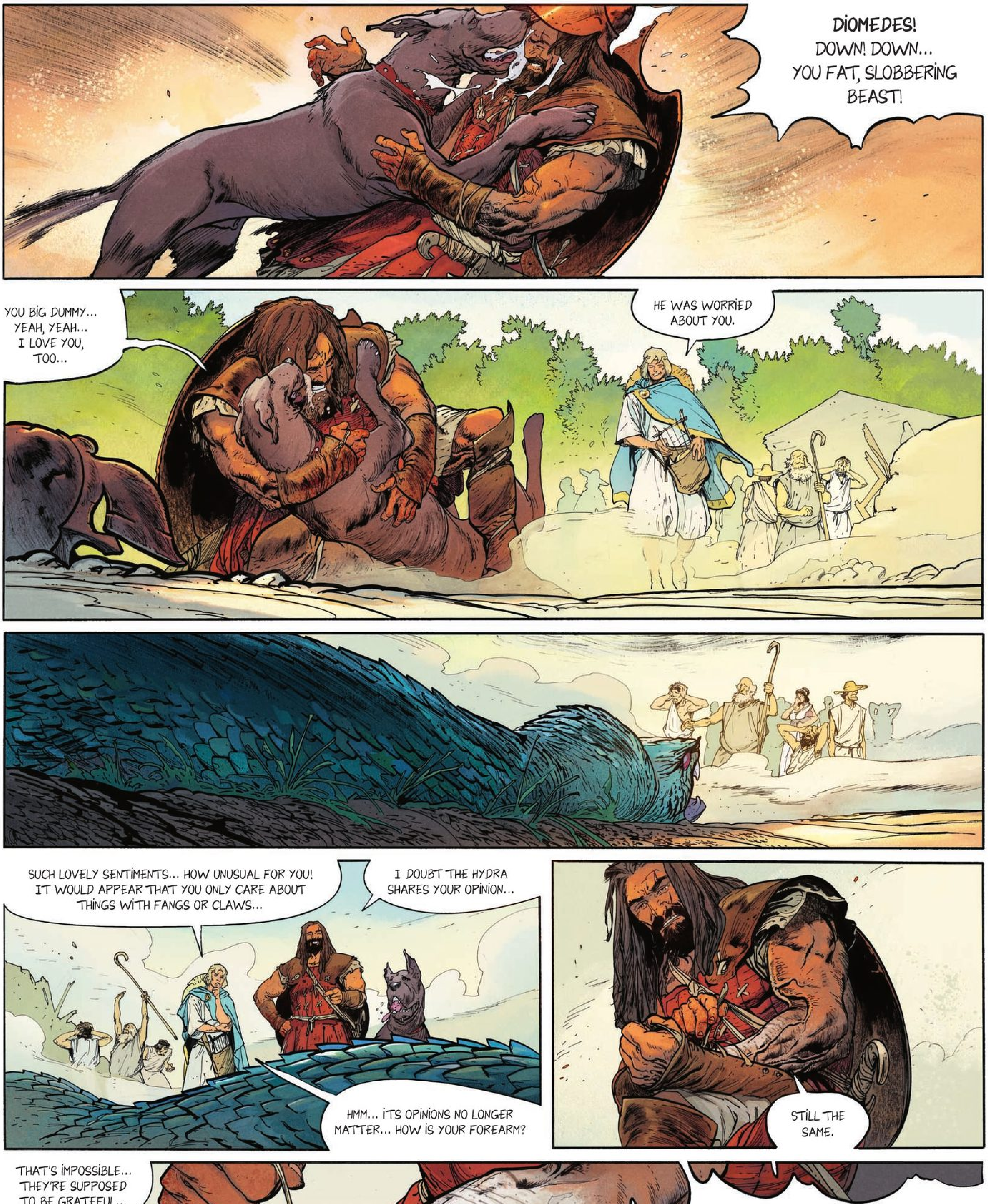
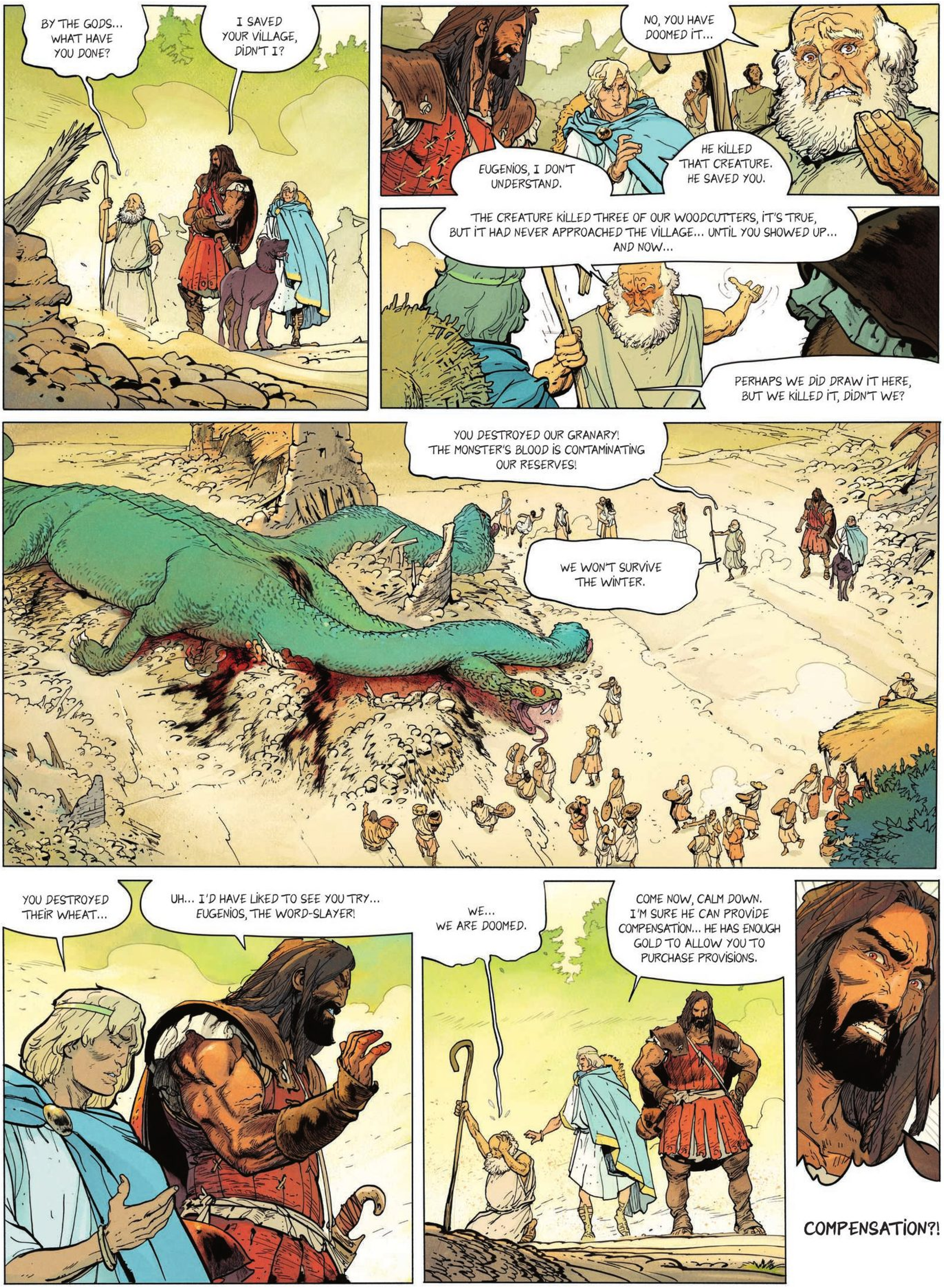

In the heart of this silent valley, despite the onset of autumn, the scorching sun of Thessaly beats down upon this hero clad in armor of shining bronze. No cool breeze brings him relief.
The thick strap of his shield weighs him down, and his arm aches with fatigue. Icy sweat runs down his back.
I THOUGHT YOU'D BE MORE IMPRESSIVE... THE ONE HERACLES SLEW WAS TWICE AS BIG... AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT THE LEGENDS SAY.
KSSRRR
OH! FORGIVE ME... I DIDN'T MEAN TO OFFEND YOU.
Beneath the helm of bronze, his face--usually so confident--grows tense. His opponent towers over him by several feet.
AFTER ALL, I, TOO, KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE... BEING CONSTANTLY COMPARED TO OTHERS... THESEUS... PERSEUS... OEDIPUS... AND HERACLES, OF COURSE.
However, he takes hold of his fear and conquers it. The demigod **Daemon** stands tall and faces the loathsome creature.
COME NOW! TO MAKE IT UP TO YOU, I'LL LET YOU ATTACK ME THREE TIMES BEFORE I STRIKE BACK. THREE, JUST LIKE...
KSSRIIII

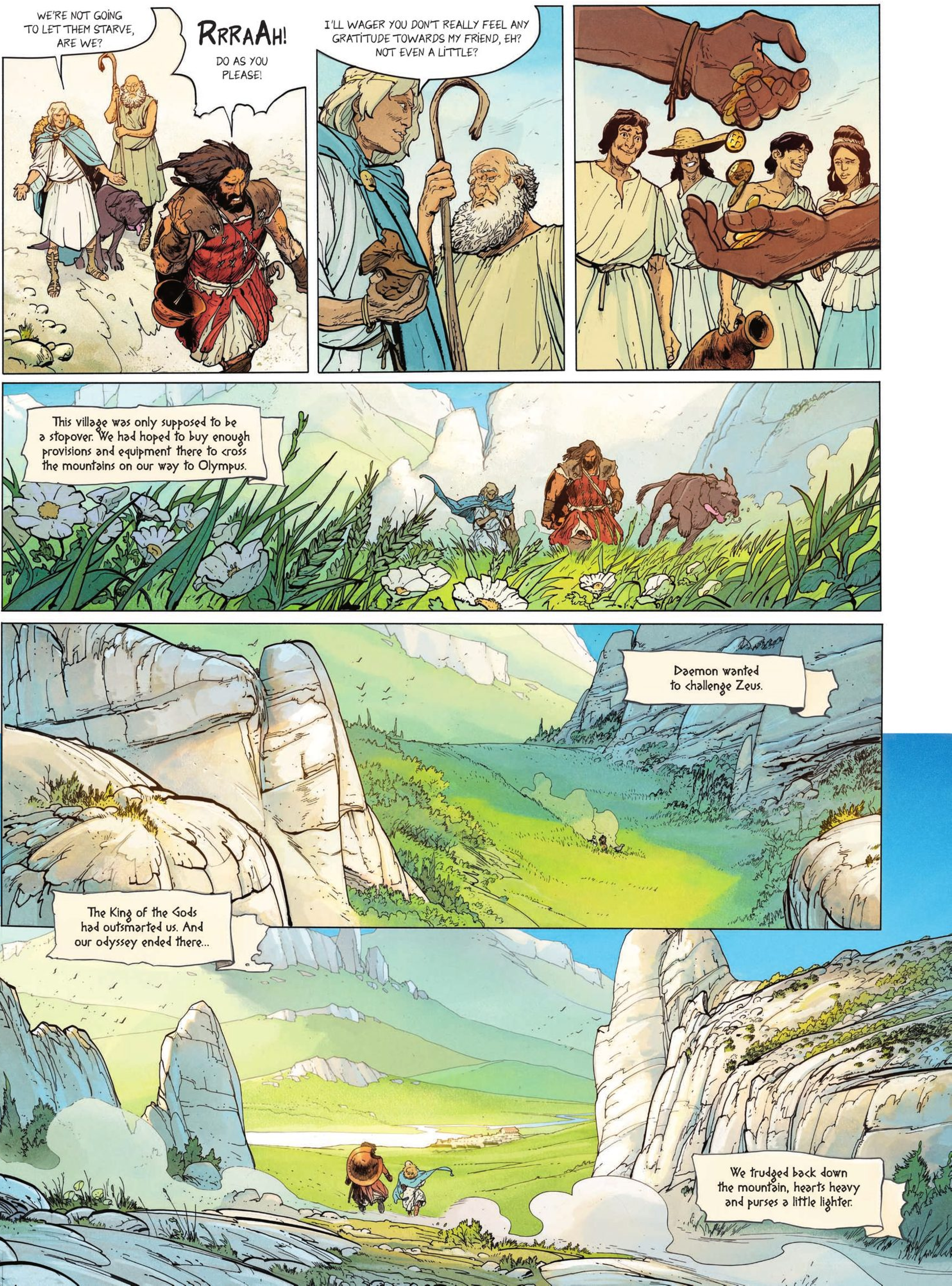

...THE NUMBER OF YOUR FETID MOUTHS!
It towers over him, a mountain of scales and fangs. Its monstrous stature eclipses all light, concealing the very sun.
As they rush together, the Hydra lashes out with the mightiest of its deadly heads, eager to devour the hero.
KLA
YOU'RE INCAPABLE OF COORDINATING YOUR ATTACKS...
Our hero staggers beneath the onslaught of the hideous maw. His steely muscles tense to ward off the imposing jaws.
YOU'RE NOTHING BUT AN INFANT... A HARMLESS LITTLE SNAKE!
Daemon knows that the slightest scratch from these sharp, poisoned fangs...

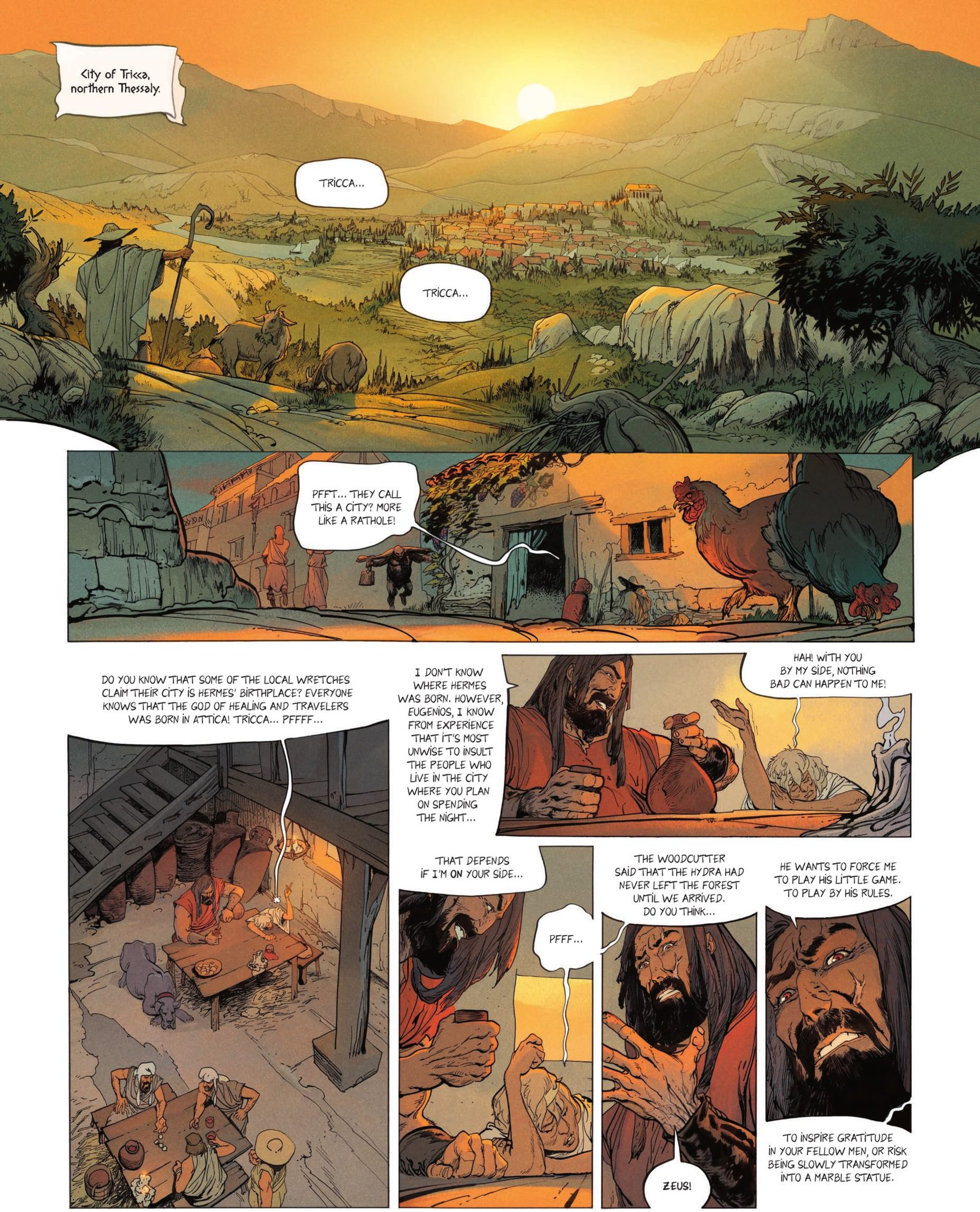

...is enough to kill him.
HMMMHN
HN HN
DON'T WORRY, DIOMEDES. HE'LL GET THROUGH THIS WITHOUT A SCRATCH...
HE ALWAYS DOES... YOUR MASTER'S A TOUGH ONE.
HN HN HN
Twice, our legendary hero narrowly avoids...
HN HN HN
...his savage opponent's murderous attacks.
In turn, the valorous Daemon lunges forward, sword in hand.
Ares, guide his hand and send his blade straight into the creature's heart.
FORGIVE ME.

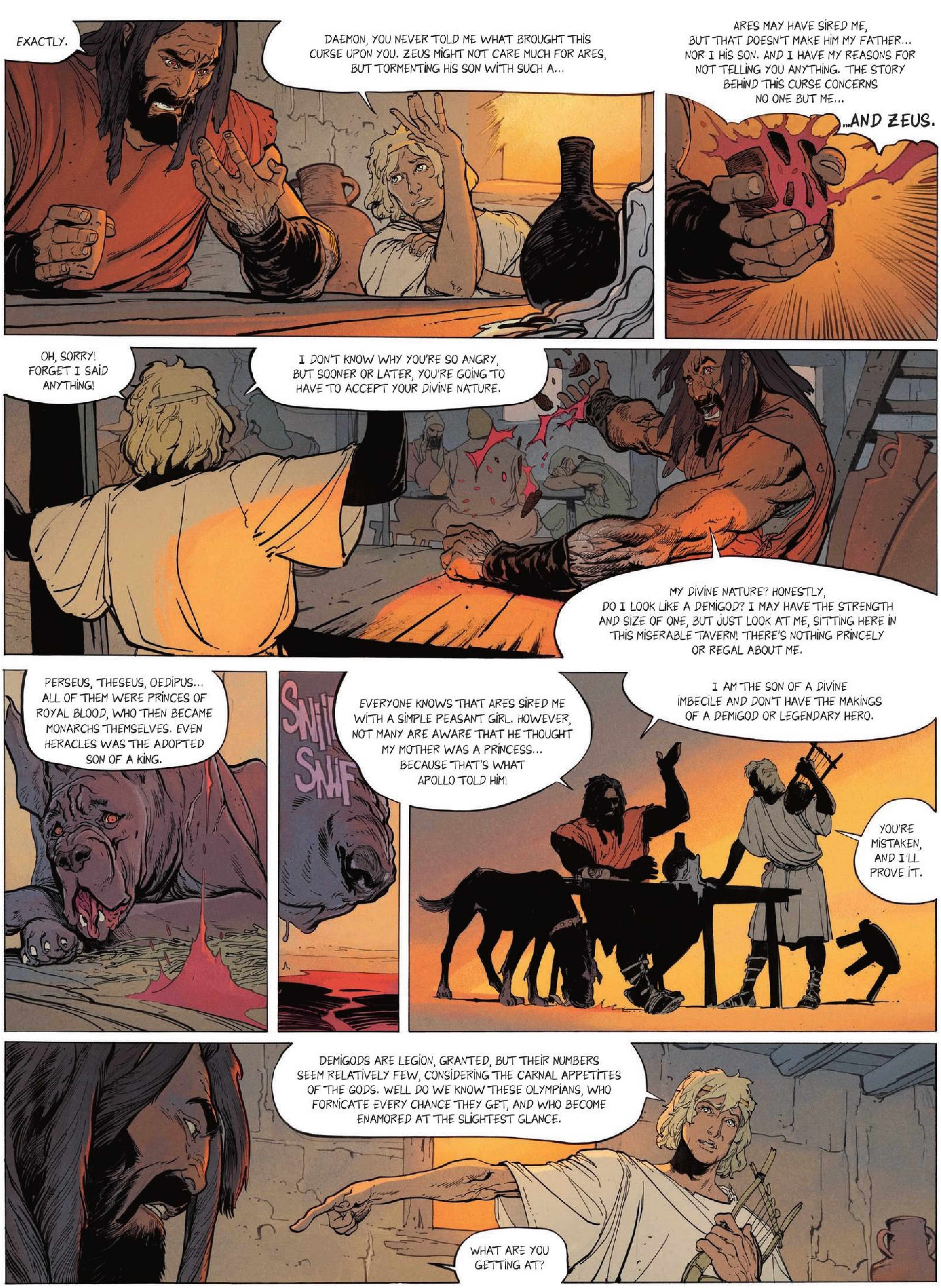

The merciless monster utters a terrible scream.
Moments later, the creature collapses, overcome by the blow of the bronze-hilted blade.
ZEUS PLACED YOU IN MY PATH. HE SLEW YOU.
Thick, rancid blood gushes from the beast's pierced heart. It soon draws its final, noxious breath.
WAWAWAW

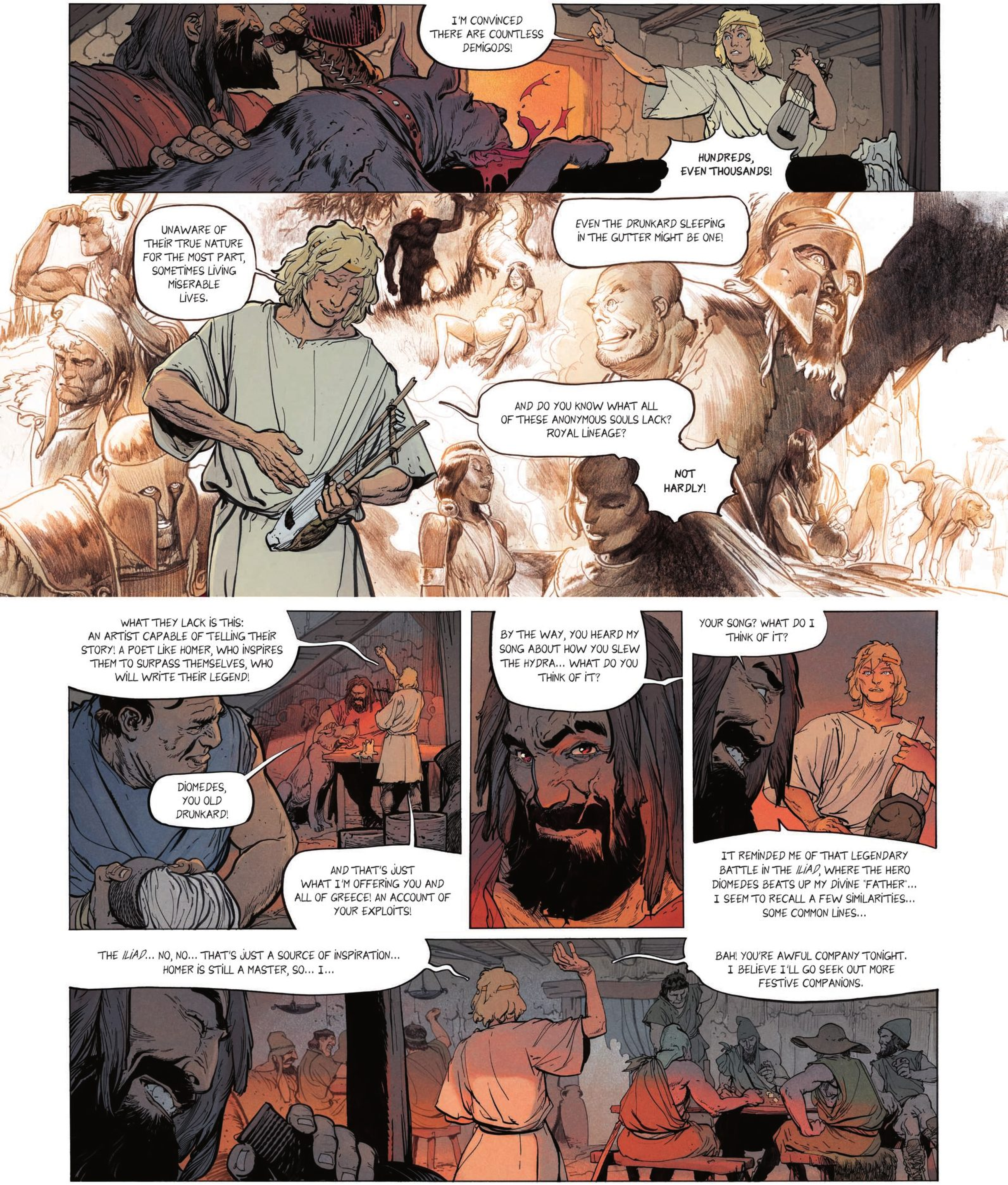

DIOMEDES! DOWN! DOWN... YOU FAT, SLOBBERING BEAST!
YOU BIG DUMMY... YEAH, YEAH... I LOVE YOU, TOO...
HE WAS WORRIED ABOUT YOU.
SUCH LOVELY SENTIMENTS... HOW UNUSUAL FOR YOU! IT WOULD APPEAR THAT YOU ONLY CARE ABOUT THINGS WITH FANGS OR CLAWS...
I DOUBT THE HYDRA SHARES YOUR OPINION...
HMM... ITS OPINIONS NO LONGER MATTER... HOW IS YOUR FOREARM?
STILL THE SAME.
THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE... THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO BE GRATEFUL...
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!

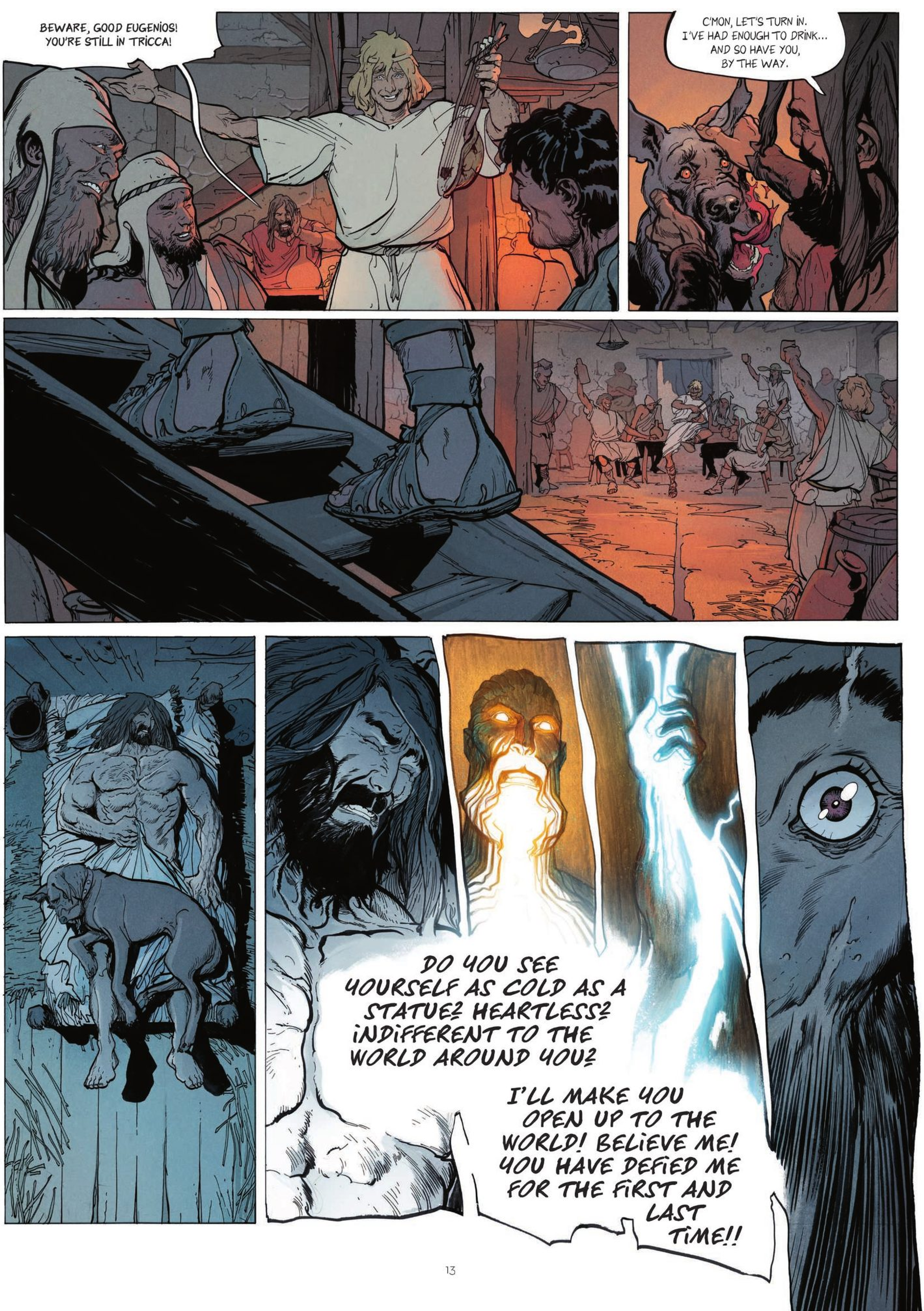

BY THE GODS… WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
I SAVED YOUR VILLAGE, DIDN'T I?
NO, YOU HAVE DOOMED IT…
EUGENIOS, I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
HE KILLED THAT CREATURE. HE SAVED YOU.
THE CREATURE KILLED THREE OF OUR WOODCUTTERS, IT'S TRUE, BUT IT HAD NEVER APPROACHED THE VILLAGE… UNTIL YOU SHOWED UP… AND NOW…
PERHAPS WE DID DRAW IT HERE, BUT WE KILLED IT, DIDN'T WE?
YOU DESTROYED OUR GRANARY! THE MONSTER'S BLOOD IS CONTAMINATING OUR RESERVES!
WE WON'T SURVIVE THE WINTER.
YOU DESTROYED THEIR WHEAT…
UH… I'D HAVE LIKED TO SEE YOU TRY… EUGENIOS, THE WORD-SLAYER!
WE… WE ARE DOOMED.
COME NOW, CALM DOWN. I'M SURE HE CAN PROVIDE COMPENSATION… HE HAS ENOUGH GOLD TO ALLOW YOU TO PURCHASE PROVISIONS.
COMPENSATION?!

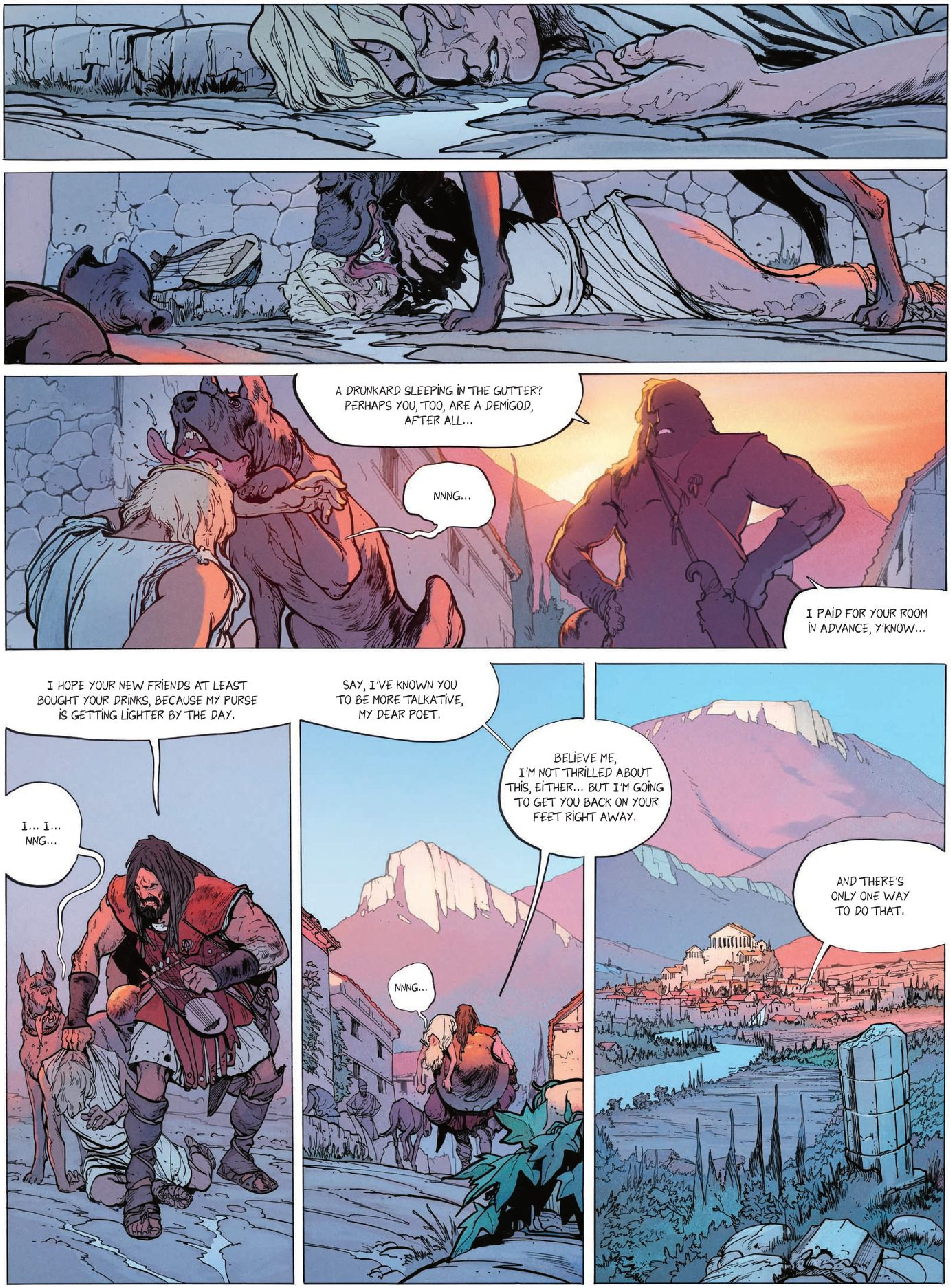

WE'RE NOT GOING TO LET THEM STARVE, ARE WE?
RRRAAH! DO AS YOU PLEASE!
I'LL WAGER YOU DON'T REALLY FEEL ANY GRATITUDE TOWARDS MY FRIEND, EH? NOT EVEN A LITTLE?
This village was only supposed to be a stopover. We had hoped to buy enough provisions and equipment there to cross the mountains on our way to Olympus.
Daemon wanted to challenge Zeus.
The King of the Gods had outsmarted us. And our odyssey ended there...
We trudged back down the mountain, hearts heavy and purses a little lighter.

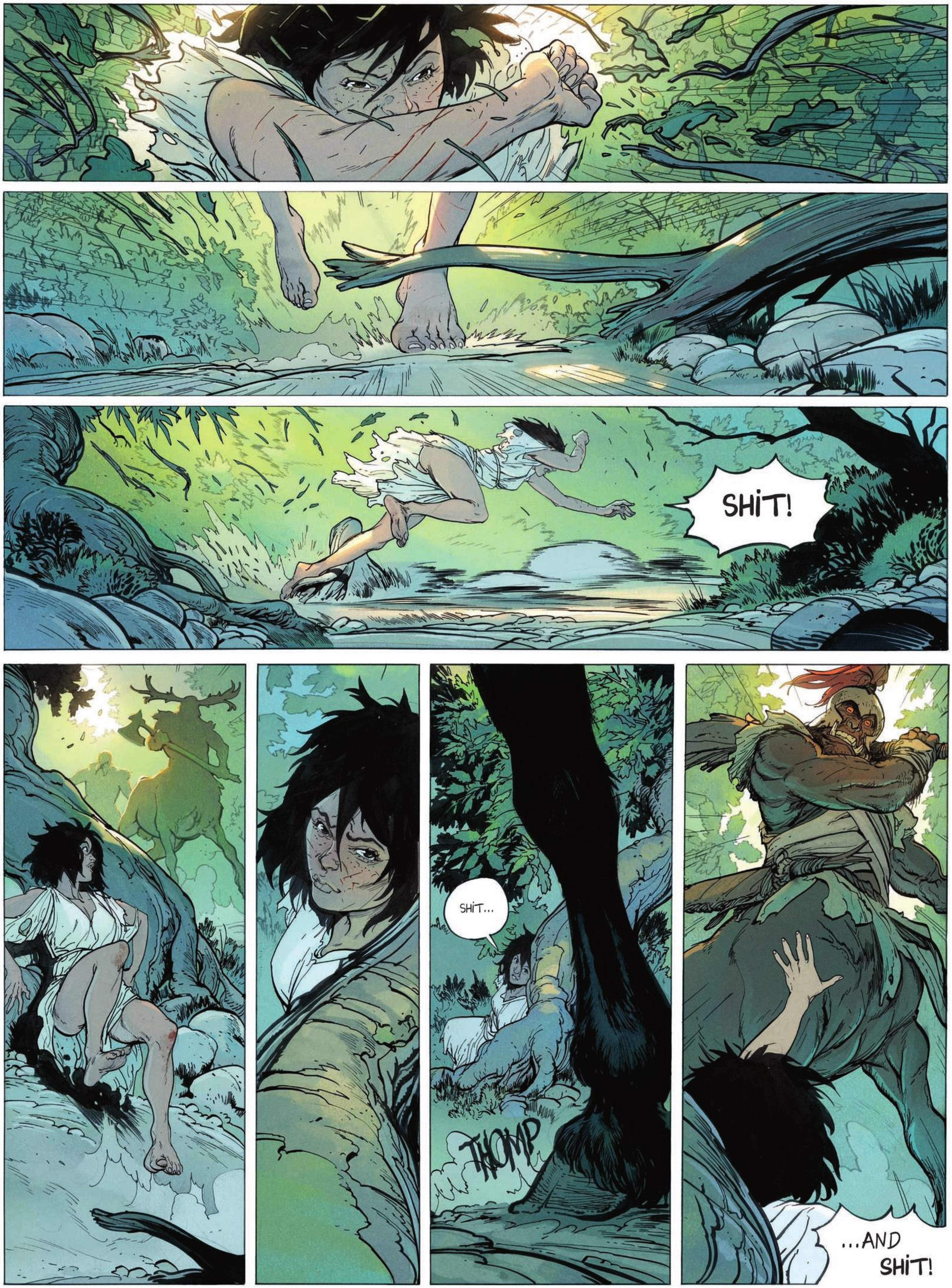

City of Tricca, northern Thessaly.
TRICCA...
TRICCA...
PFFT... THEY CALL THIS A CITY? MORE LIKE A RATHOLE!
DO YOU KNOW THAT SOME OF THE LOCAL WRETCHES CLAIM THEIR CITY IS HERMES' BIRTHPLACE? EVERYONE KNOWS THAT THE GOD OF HEALING AND TRAVELERS WAS BORN IN ATTICA! TRICCA... PFFFF...
I DON'T KNOW WHERE HERMES WAS BORN. HOWEVER, EUGENIOS, I KNOW FROM EXPERIENCE THAT IT'S MOST UNWISE TO INSULT THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN THE CITY WHERE YOU PLAN ON SPENDING THE NIGHT...
HAH! WITH YOU BY MY SIDE, NOTHING BAD CAN HAPPEN TO ME!
THAT DEPENDS IF I'M ON YOUR SIDE...
PFFF...
THE WOODCUTTER SAID THAT THE HYDRA HAD NEVER LEFT THE FOREST UNTIL WE ARRIVED. DO YOU THINK...
ZEUS!
HE WANTS TO FORCE ME TO PLAY HIS LITTLE GAME. TO PLAY BY HIS RULES.
TO INSPIRE GRATITUDE IN YOUR FELLOW MEN, OR RISK BEING SLOWLY TRANSFORMED INTO A MARBLE STATUE.

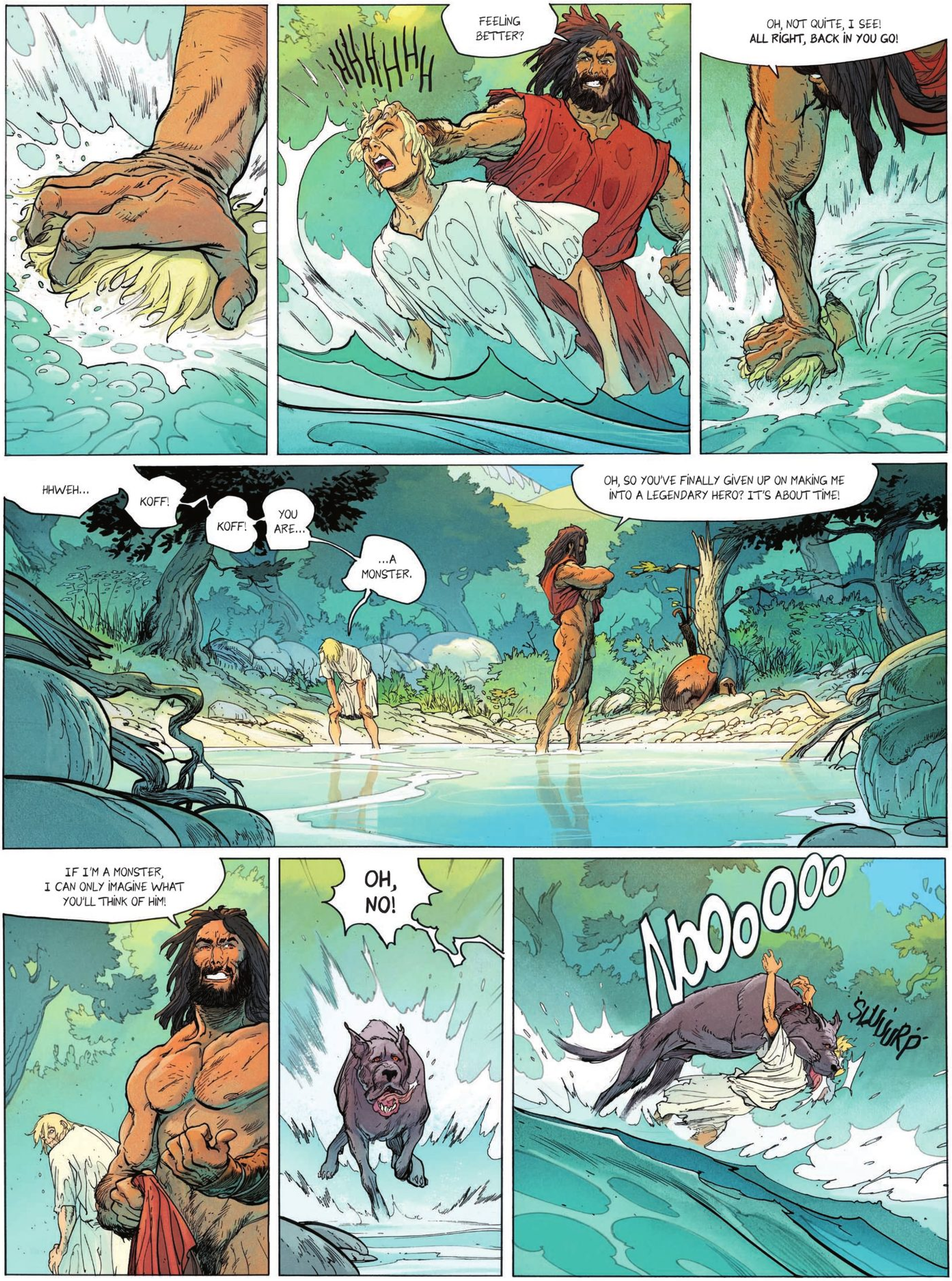

EXACTLY.
DAEMON, YOU NEVER TOLD ME WHAT BROUGHT THIS CURSE UPON YOU. ZEUS MIGHT NOT CARE MUCH FOR ARES, BUT TORMENTING HIS SON WITH SUCH A...
ARES MAY HAVE SIRED ME, BUT THAT DOESN'T MAKE HIM MY FATHER... NOR I HIS SON. AND I HAVE MY REASONS FOR NOT TELLING YOU ANYTHING. THE STORY BEHIND THIS CURSE CONCERNS NO ONE BUT ME...
...AND ZEUS.
OH, SORRY! FORGET I SAID ANYTHING!
I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU'RE SO ANGRY, BUT SOONER OR LATER, YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO ACCEPT YOUR DIVINE NATURE.
MY DIVINE NATURE? HONESTLY, DO I LOOK LIKE A DEMIGOD? I MAY HAVE THE STRENGTH AND SIZE OF ONE, BUT JUST LOOK AT ME, SITTING HERE IN THIS MISERABLE TAVERN! THERE'S NOTHING PRINCELY OR REGAL ABOUT ME.
PERSEUS, THESEUS, OEDIPUS... ALL OF THEM WERE PRINCES OF ROYAL BLOOD, WHO THEN BECAME MONARCHS THEMSELVES. EVEN HERACLES WAS THE ADOPTED SON OF A KING.
SNIII
SNIF
EVERYONE KNOWS THAT ARES SIRED ME WITH A SIMPLE PEASANT GIRL. HOWEVER, NOT MANY ARE AWARE THAT HE THOUGHT MY MOTHER WAS A PRINCESS... BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT APOLLO TOLD HIM!
I AM THE SON OF A DIVINE IMBECILE AND DON'T HAVE THE MAKINGS OF A DEMIGOD OR LEGENDARY HERO.
YOU'RE MISTAKEN, AND I'LL PROVE IT.
DEMIGODS ARE LEGION, GRANTED, BUT THEIR NUMBERS SEEM RELATIVELY FEW, CONSIDERING THE CARNAL APPETITES OF THE GODS. WELL DO WE KNOW THESE OLYMPIANS, WHO FORNICATE EVERY CHANCE THEY GET, AND WHO BECOME ENAMORED AT THE SLIGHTEST GLANCE.
WHAT ARE YOU GETTING AT?

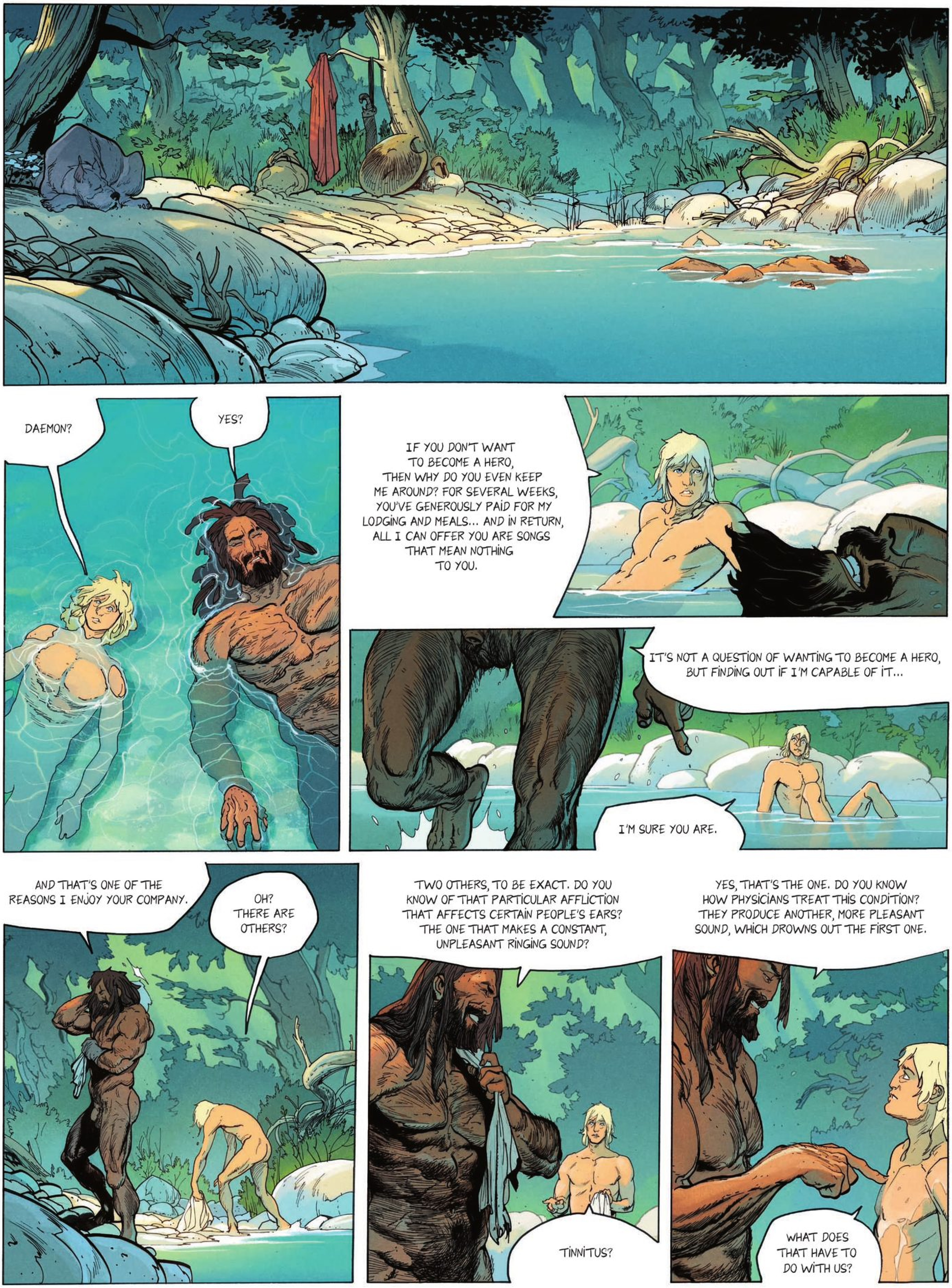

I'M CONVINCED THERE ARE COUNTLESS DEMIGODS!
HUNDREDS, EVEN THOUSANDS!
UNAWARE OF THEIR TRUE NATURE FOR THE MOST PART, SOMETIMES LIVING MISERABLE LIVES.
EVEN THE DRUNKARD SLEEPING IN THE GUTTER MIGHT BE ONE!
AND DO YOU KNOW WHAT ALL OF THESE ANONYMOUS SOULS LACK? ROYAL LINEAGE?
NOT HARDLY!
WHAT THEY LACK IS THIS: AN ARTIST CAPABLE OF TELLING THEIR STORY! A POET LIKE HOMER, WHO INSPIRES THEM TO SURPASS THEMSELVES, WHO WILL WRITE THEIR LEGEND!
DIOMEDES, YOU OLD DRUNKARD!
AND THAT'S JUST WHAT I'M OFFERING YOU AND ALL OF GREECE! AN ACCOUNT OF YOUR EXPLOITS!
BY THE WAY, YOU HEARD MY SONG ABOUT HOW YOU SLEW THE HYDRA... WHAT DO YOU THINK OF IT?
YOUR SONG? WHAT DO I THINK OF IT?
IT REMINDED ME OF THAT LEGENDARY BATTLE IN THE *ILIAD*, WHERE THE HERO DIOMEDES BEATS UP MY DIVINE "FATHER"... I SEEM TO RECALL A FEW SIMILARITIES... SOME COMMON LINES...
THE *ILIAD*... NO, NO... THAT'S JUST A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION... HOMER IS STILL A MASTER, SO... I...
BAH! YOU'RE AWFUL COMPANY TONIGHT. I BELIEVE I'LL GO SEEK OUT MORE FESTIVE COMPANIONS.

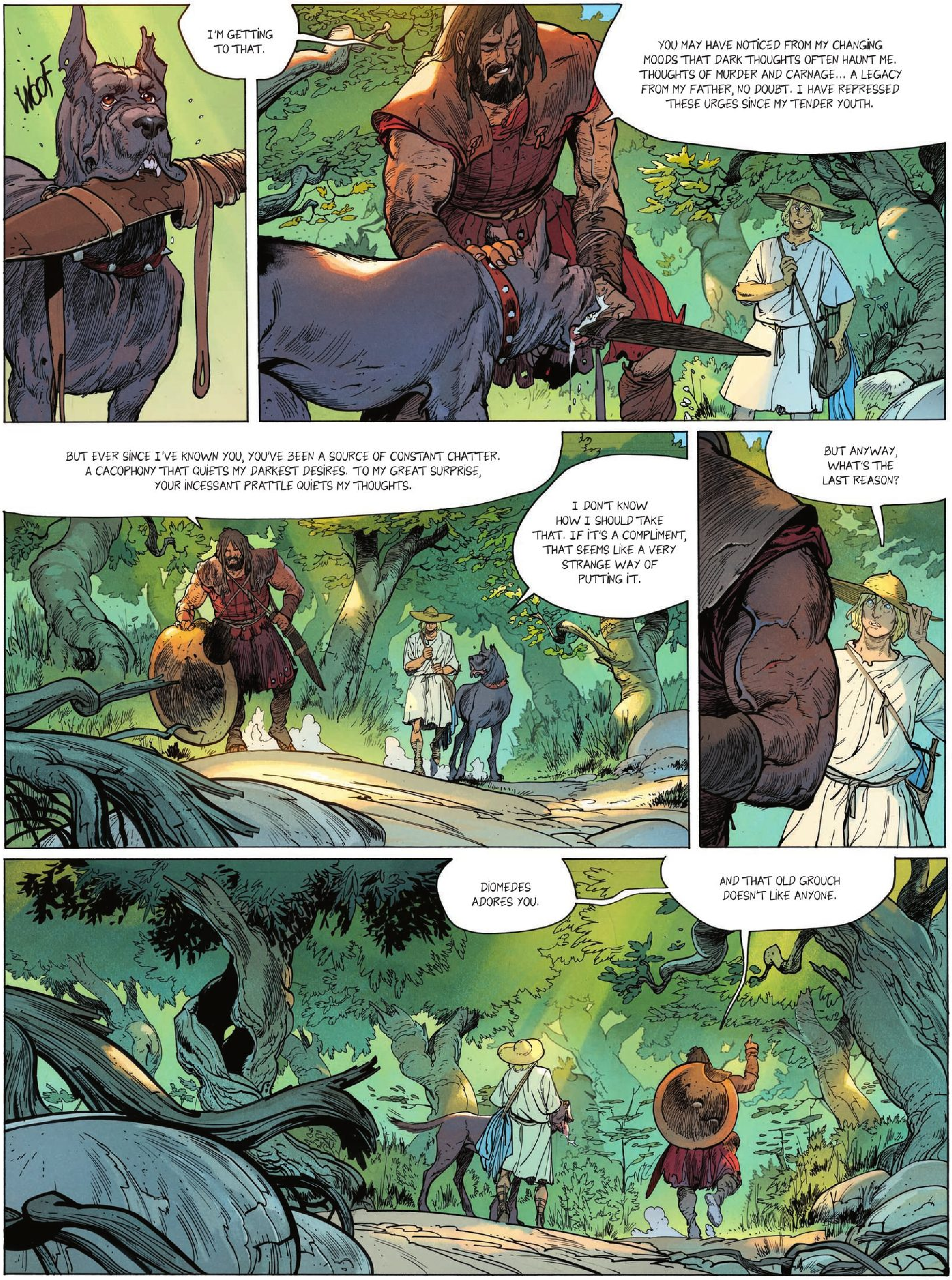

BEWARE, GOOD EUGENIOS! YOU'RE STILL IN TRICCA!
C'MON, LET'S TURN IN. I'VE HAD ENOUGH TO DRINK... AND SO HAVE YOU, BY THE WAY.
DO YOU SEE YOURSELF AS COLD AS A STATUE? HEARTLESS? INDIFFERENT TO THE WORLD AROUND YOU?
I'LL MAKE YOU OPEN UP TO THE WORLD! BELIEVE ME! YOU HAVE DEFIED ME FOR THE FIRST AND LAST TIME!!

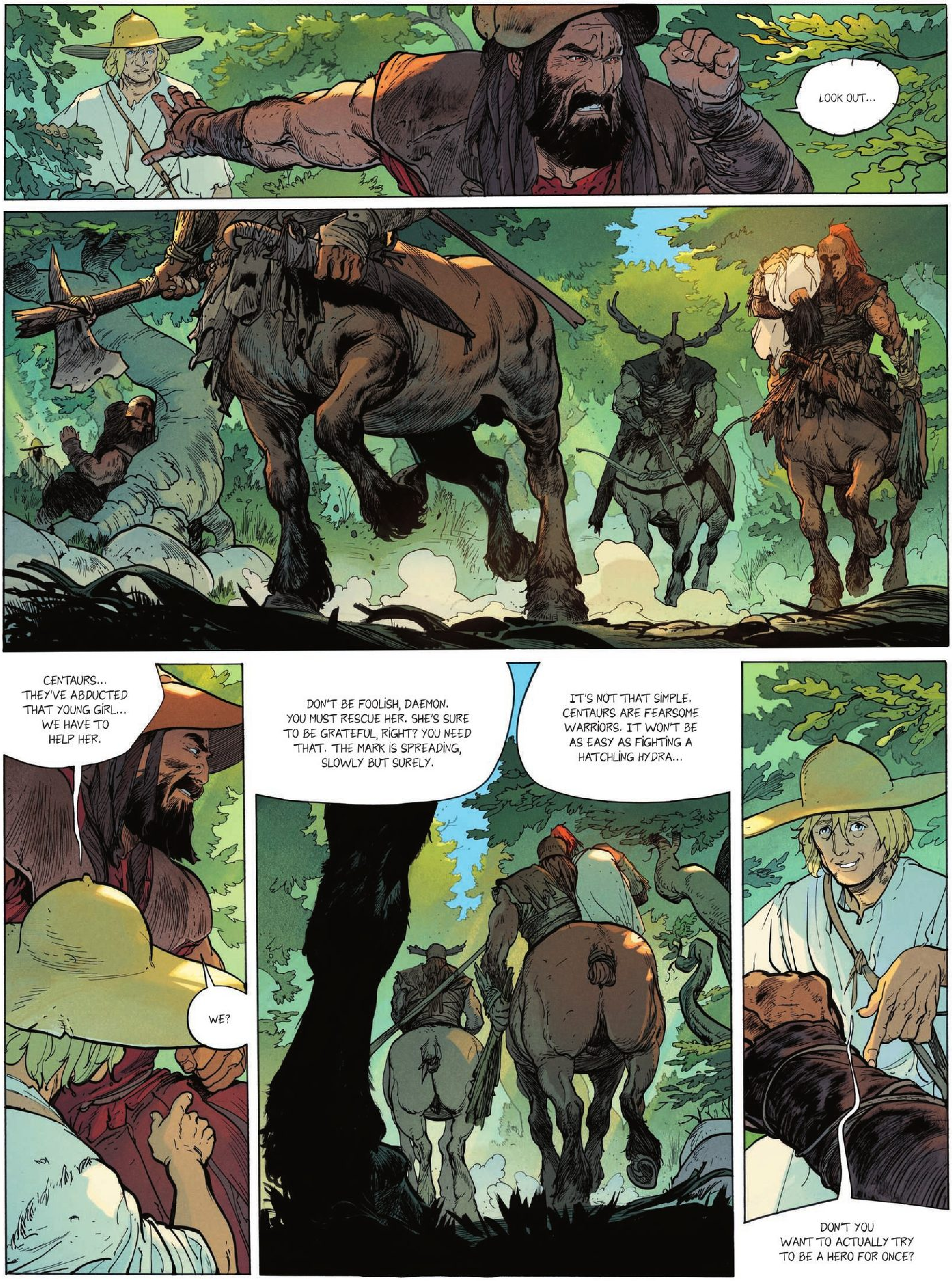

A DRUNKARD SLEEPING IN THE GUTTER? PERHAPS YOU, TOO, ARE A DEMIGOD, AFTER ALL...
NNNG...
I PAID FOR YOUR ROOM IN ADVANCE, Y'KNOW...
I HOPE YOUR NEW FRIENDS AT LEAST BOUGHT YOUR DRINKS, BECAUSE MY PURSE IS GETTING LIGHTER BY THE DAY.
I... I... NNG...
SAY, I'VE KNOWN YOU TO BE MORE TALKATIVE, MY DEAR POET.
BELIEVE ME, I'M NOT THRILLED ABOUT THIS, EITHER... BUT I'M GOING TO GET YOU BACK ON YOUR FEET RIGHT AWAY.
NNNG...
AND THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO DO THAT.

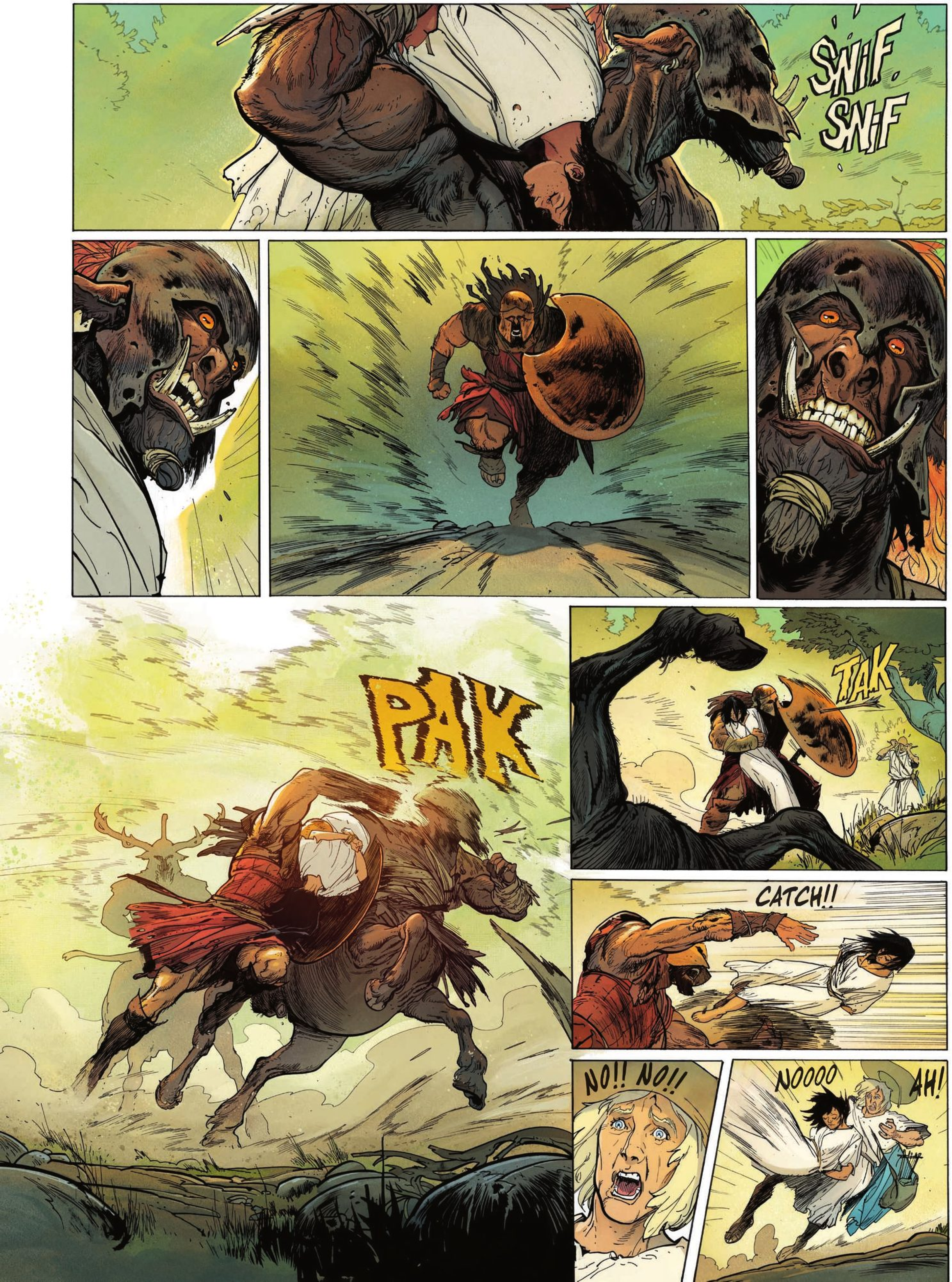

SHIT!
SHIT...
THOMP
...AND SHIT!

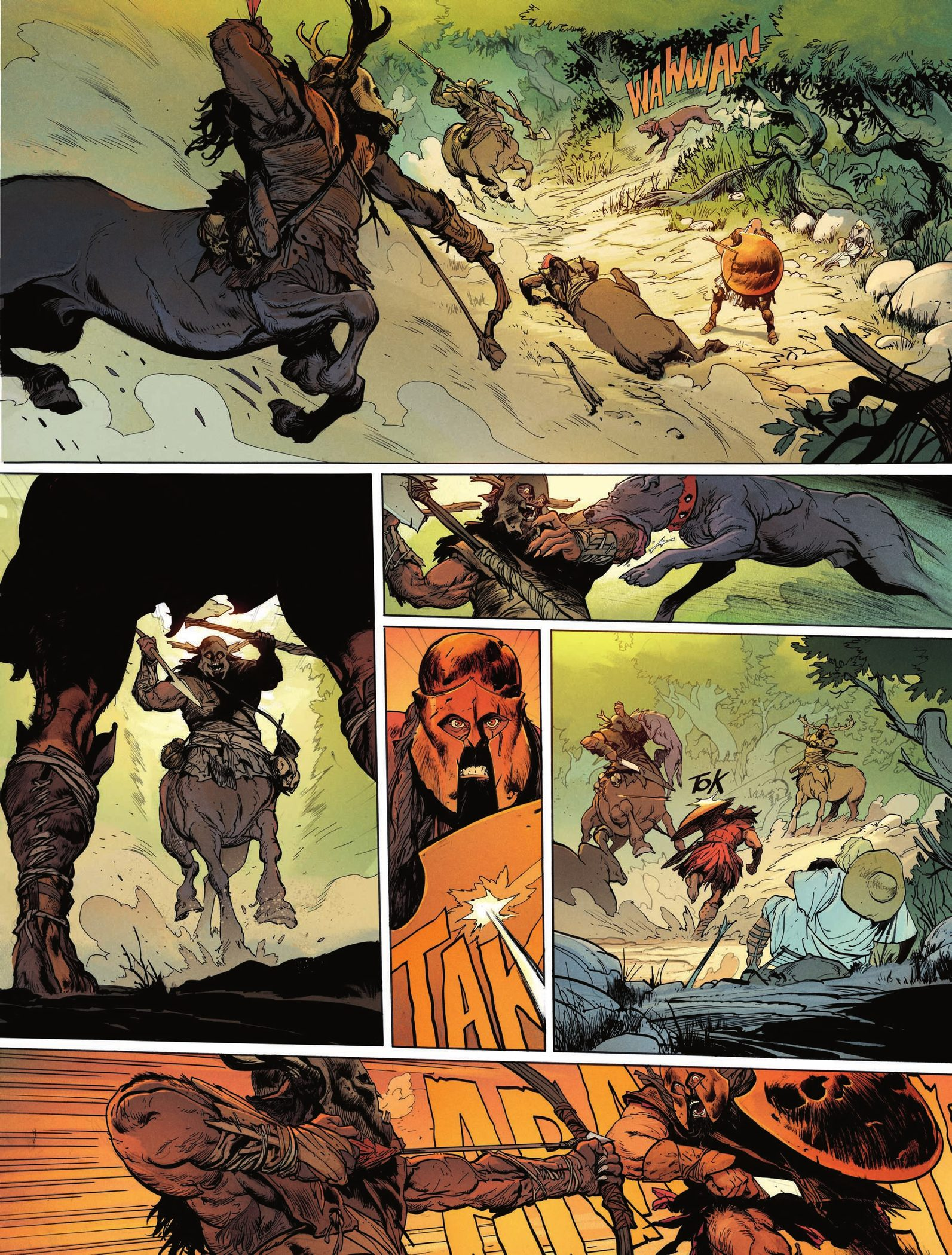

HHHHHHH
FEELING BETTER?
OH, NOT QUITE, I SEE! ALL RIGHT, BACK IN YOU GO!
HHWEH...
KOFF!
KOFF!
YOU ARE...
...A MONSTER.
OH, SO YOU'VE FINALLY GIVEN UP ON MAKING ME INTO A LEGENDARY HERO? IT'S ABOUT TIME!
IF I'M A MONSTER, I CAN ONLY IMAGINE WHAT YOU'LL THINK OF HIM!
OH, NO!
NOOOOOOO
SLUURP

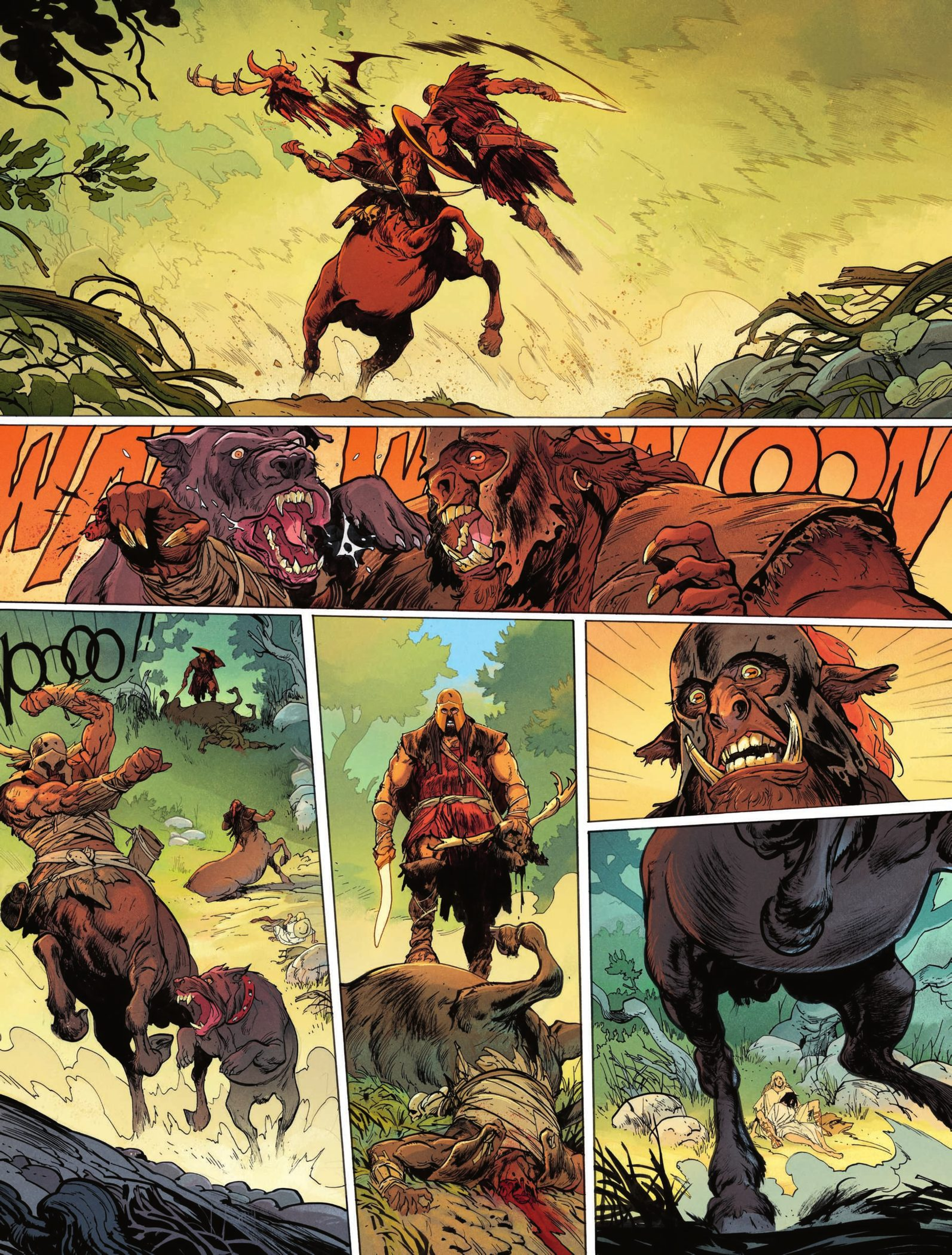

DAEMON?
YES?
IF YOU DON'T WANT TO BECOME A HERO, THEN WHY DO YOU EVEN KEEP ME AROUND? FOR SEVERAL WEEKS, YOU'VE GENEROUSLY PAID FOR MY LODGING AND MEALS... AND IN RETURN, ALL I CAN OFFER YOU ARE SONGS THAT MEAN NOTHING TO YOU.
IT'S NOT A QUESTION OF WANTING TO BECOME A HERO, BUT FINDING OUT IF I'M CAPABLE OF IT...
I'M SURE YOU ARE.
AND THAT'S ONE OF THE REASONS I ENJOY YOUR COMPANY.
OH? THERE ARE OTHERS?
TWO OTHERS, TO BE EXACT. DO YOU KNOW OF THAT PARTICULAR AFFLICTION THAT AFFECTS CERTAIN PEOPLE'S EARS? THE ONE THAT MAKES A CONSTANT, UNPLEASANT RINGING SOUND?
TINNITUS?
YES, THAT'S THE ONE. DO YOU KNOW HOW PHYSICIANS TREAT THIS CONDITION? THEY PRODUCE ANOTHER, MORE PLEASANT SOUND, WHICH DROWNS OUT THE FIRST ONE.
WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH US?

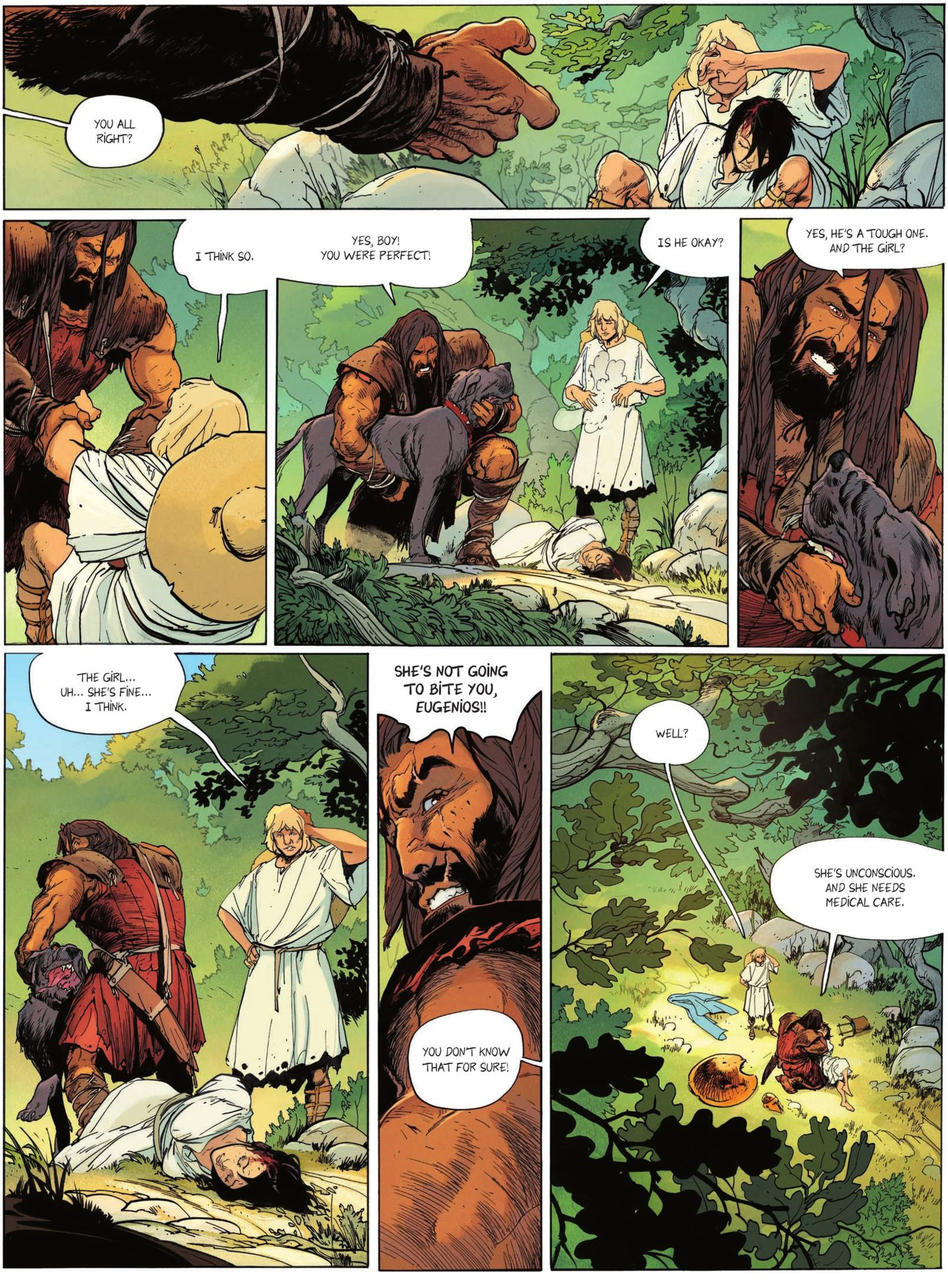

WOOF
I'M GETTING TO THAT.
YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED FROM MY CHANGING MOODS THAT DARK THOUGHTS OFTEN HAUNT ME. THOUGHTS OF MURDER AND CARNAGE... A LEGACY FROM MY FATHER, NO DOUBT. I HAVE REPRESSED THESE URGES SINCE MY TENDER YOUTH.
BUT EVER SINCE I'VE KNOWN YOU, YOU'VE BEEN A SOURCE OF CONSTANT CHATTER. A CACOPHONY THAT QUIETS MY DARKEST DESIRES. TO MY GREAT SURPRISE, YOUR INCESSANT PRATTLE QUIETS MY THOUGHTS.
I DON'T KNOW HOW I SHOULD TAKE THAT. IF IT'S A COMPLIMENT, THAT SEEMS LIKE A VERY STRANGE WAY OF PUTTING IT.
BUT ANYWAY, WHAT'S THE LAST REASON?
DIOMEDES ADORES YOU.
AND THAT OLD GROUCH DOESN'T LIKE ANYONE.

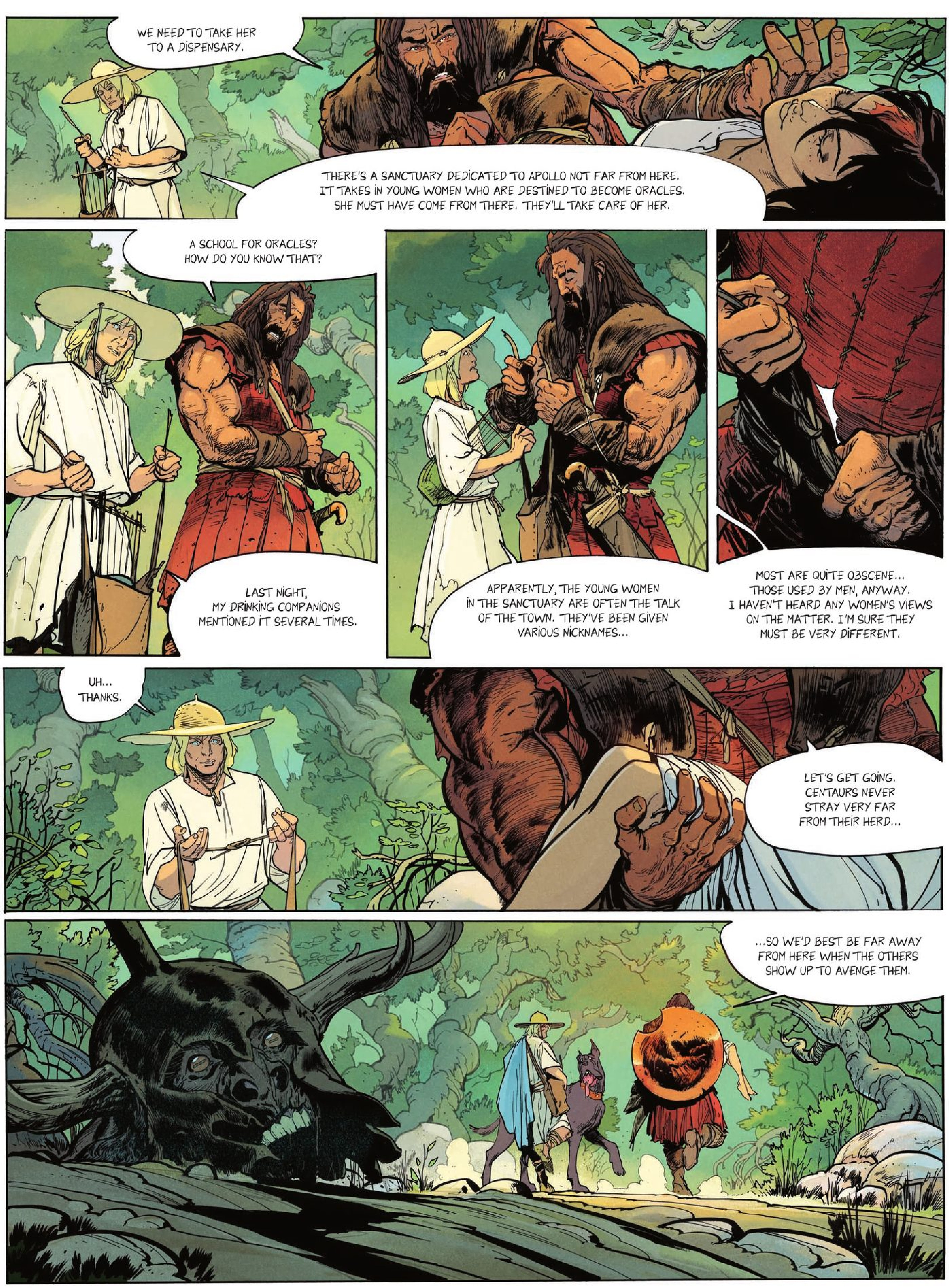

LOOK OUT...
CENTAURS... THEY'VE ABDUCTED THAT YOUNG GIRL... WE HAVE TO HELP HER.
WE?
DON'T BE FOOLISH, DAEMON. YOU MUST RESCUE HER. SHE'S SURE TO BE GRATEFUL, RIGHT? YOU NEED THAT. THE MARK IS SPREADING, SLOWLY BUT SURELY.
IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE. CENTAURS ARE FEARSOME WARRIORS. IT WON'T BE AS EASY AS FIGHTING A HATCHLING HYDRA...
DON'T YOU WANT TO ACTUALLY TRY TO BE A HERO FOR ONCE?

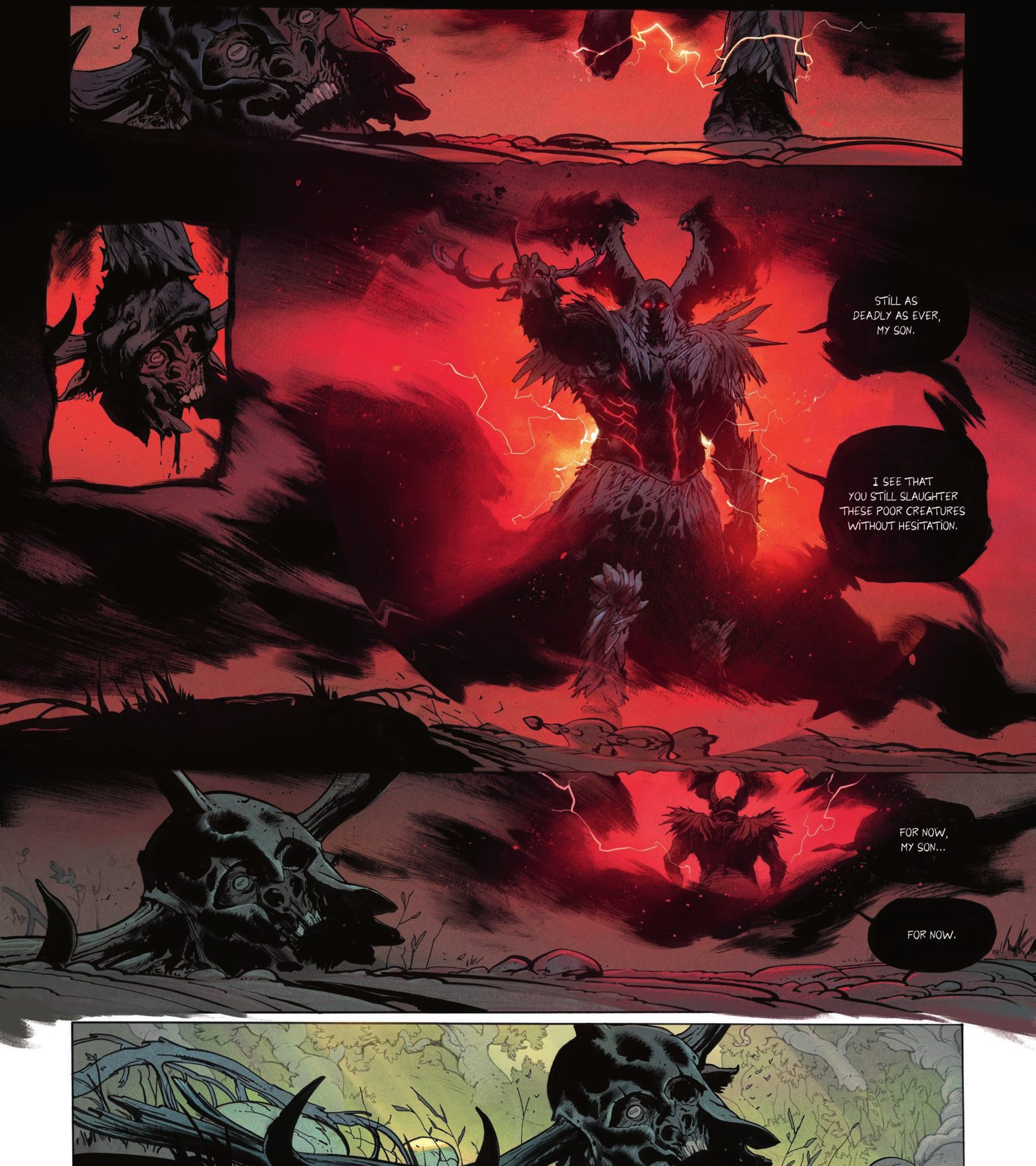

SNIF
SNIF
PAK
TAK
CATCH!!
NO!! NO!!
NOOOO
AH!

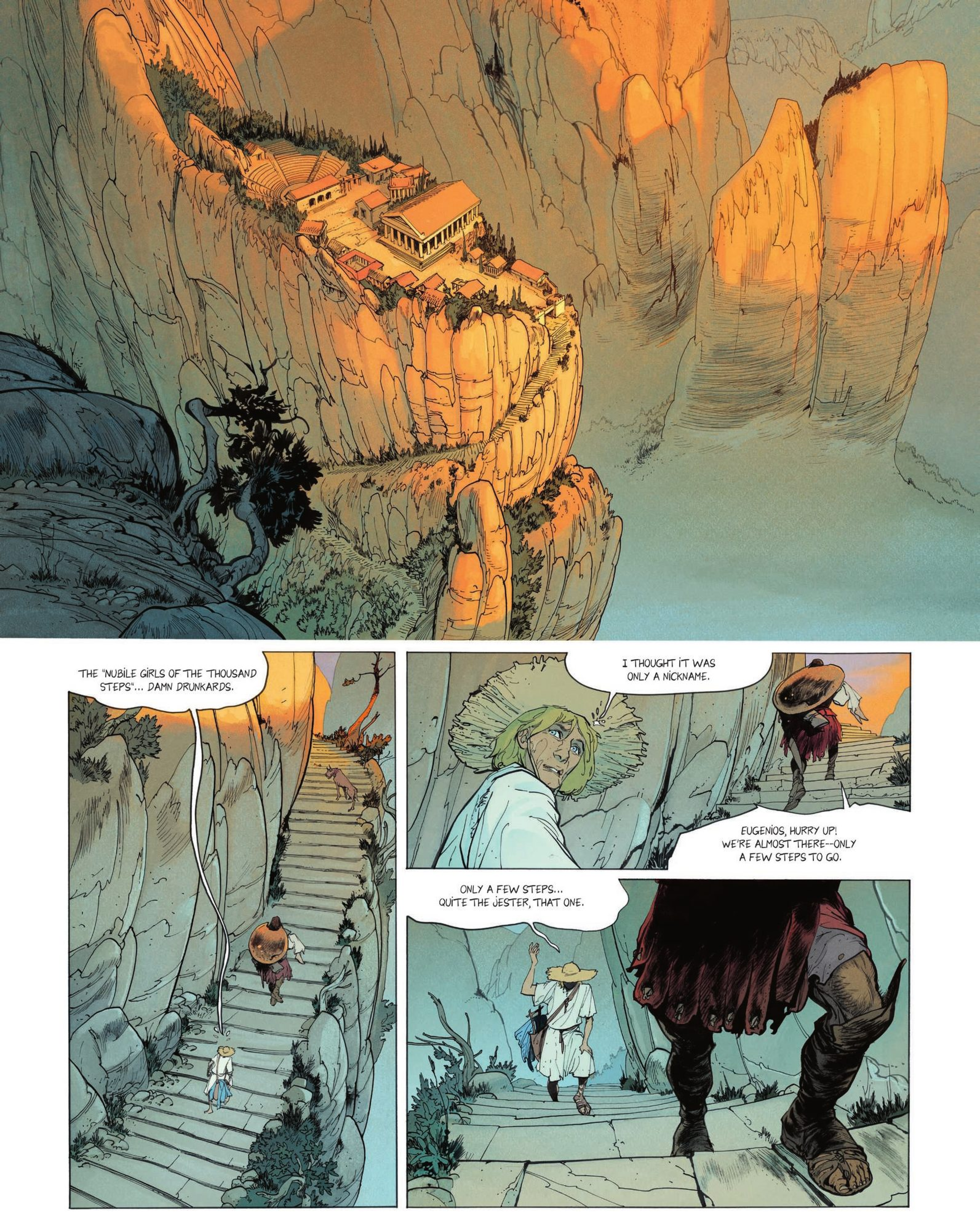

WAWWAW!
TOK
TAK

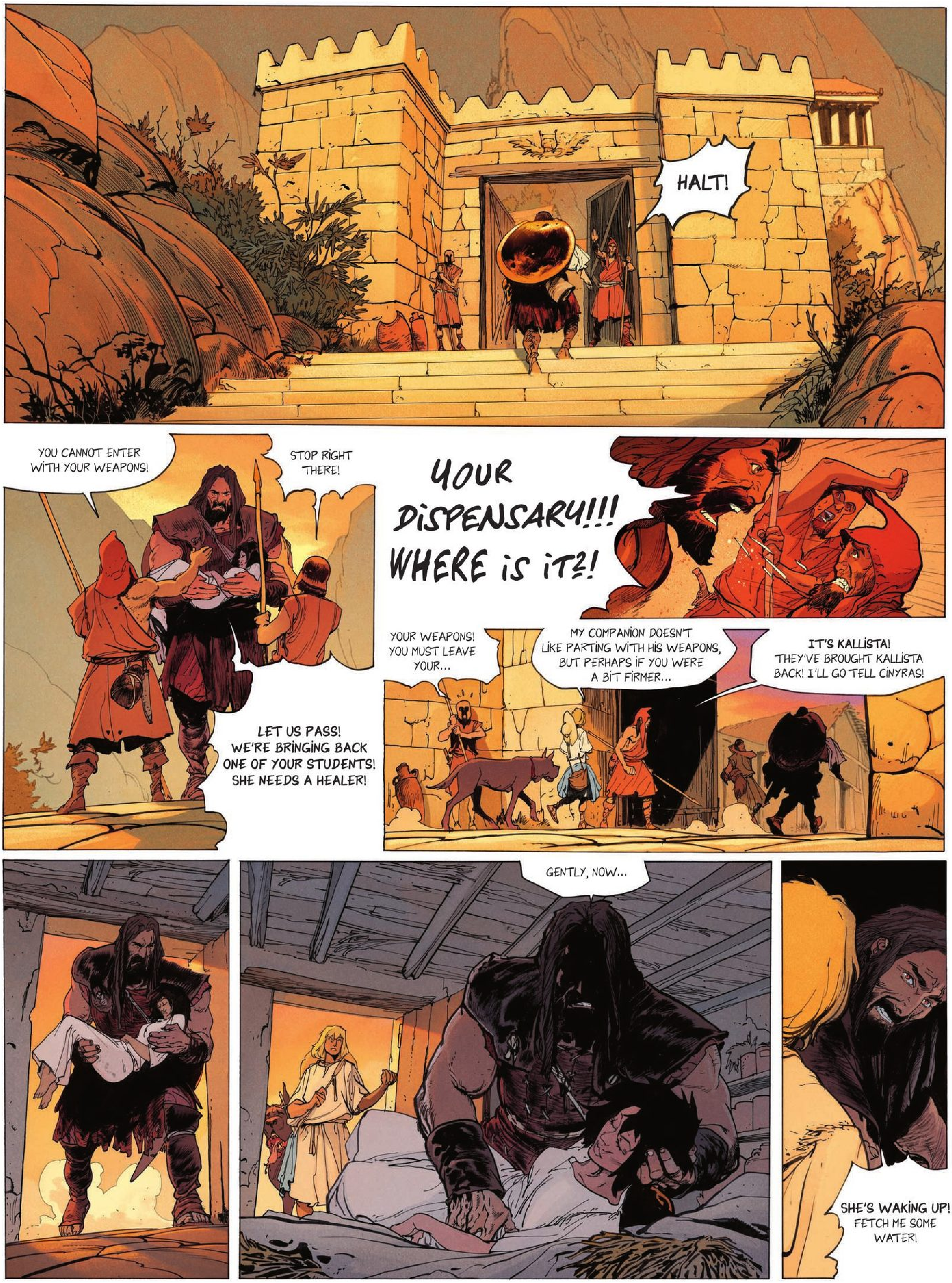

pOOOO!!

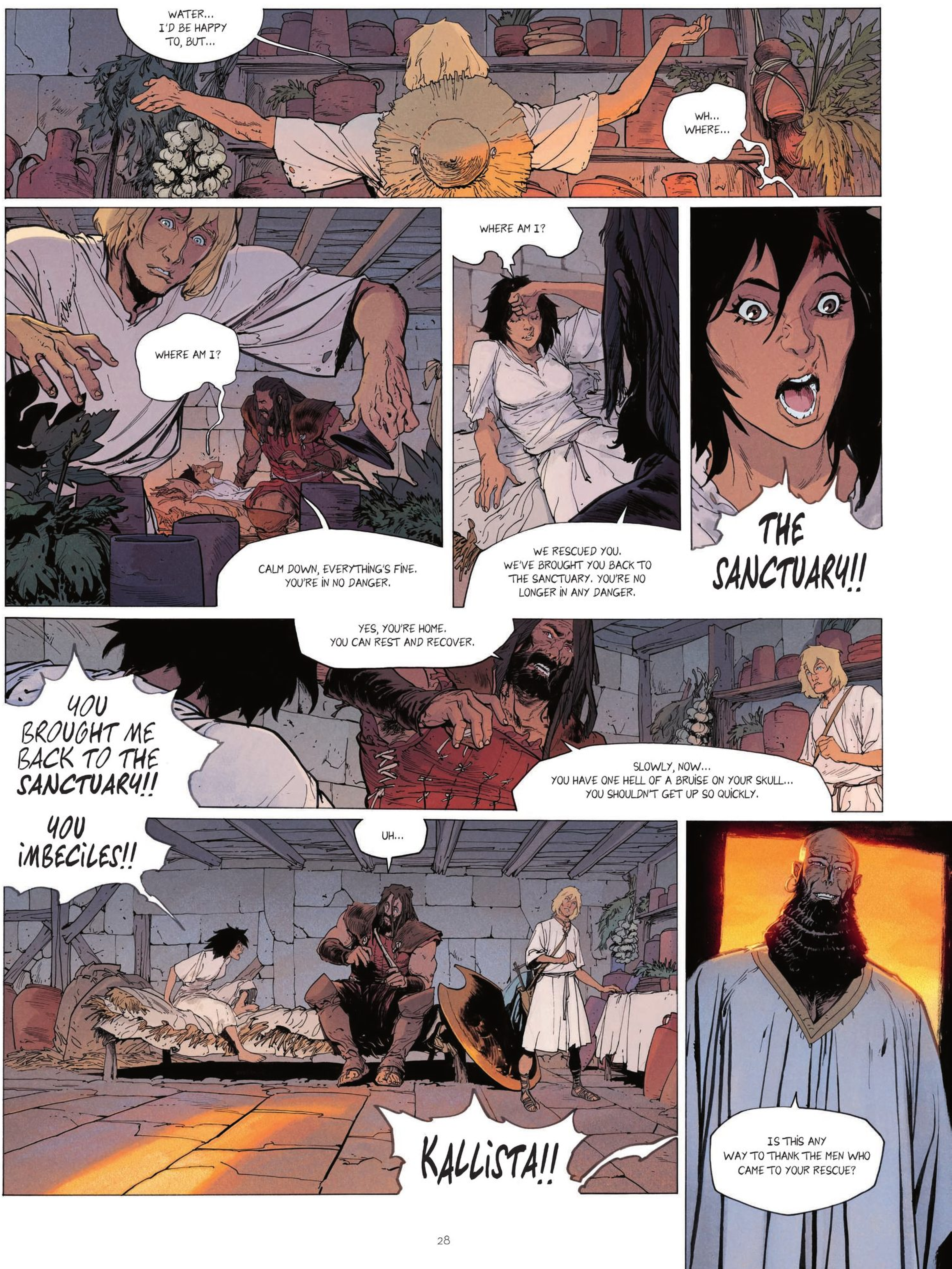

YOU ALL RIGHT?
I THINK SO.
YES, BOY! YOU WERE PERFECT!
IS HE OKAY?
YES, HE'S A TOUGH ONE. AND THE GIRL?
THE GIRL... UH... SHE'S FINE... I THINK.
SHE'S NOT GOING TO BITE YOU, EUGENIOS!!
YOU DON'T KNOW THAT FOR SURE!
WELL?
SHE'S UNCONSCIOUS. AND SHE NEEDS MEDICAL CARE.

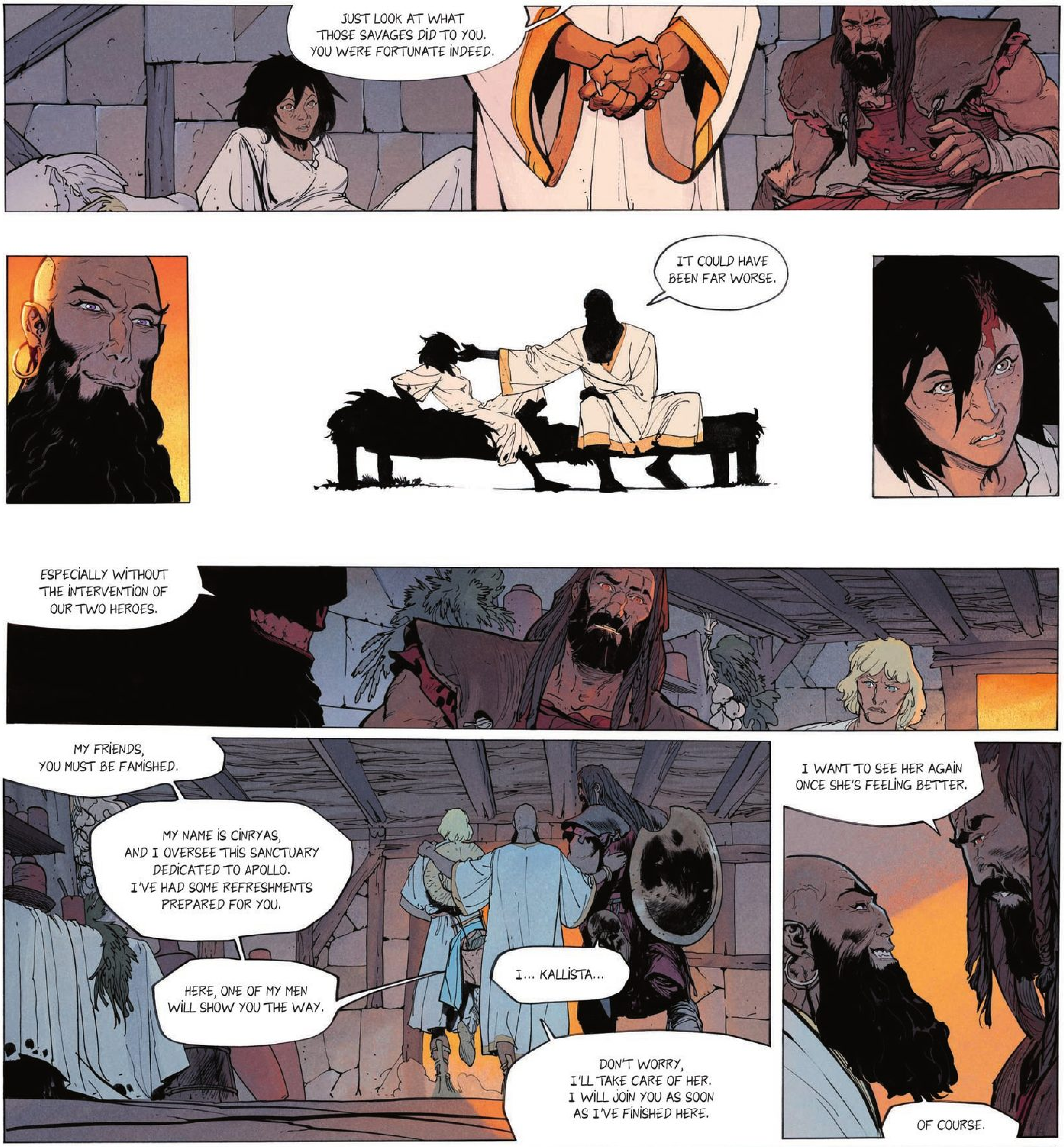

WE NEED TO TAKE HER TO A DISPENSARY.
THERE'S A SANCTUARY DEDICATED TO APOLLO NOT FAR FROM HERE. IT TAKES IN YOUNG WOMEN WHO ARE DESTINED TO BECOME ORACLES. SHE MUST HAVE COME FROM THERE. THEY'LL TAKE CARE OF HER.
A SCHOOL FOR ORACLES? HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?
LAST NIGHT, MY DRINKING COMPANIONS MENTIONED IT SEVERAL TIMES.
APPARENTLY, THE YOUNG WOMEN IN THE SANCTUARY ARE OFTEN THE TALK OF THE TOWN. THEY'VE BEEN GIVEN VARIOUS NICKNAMES...
MOST ARE QUITE OBSCENE... THOSE USED BY MEN, ANYWAY. I HAVEN'T HEARD ANY WOMEN'S VIEWS ON THE MATTER. I'M SURE THEY MUST BE VERY DIFFERENT.
UH... THANKS.
LET'S GET GOING. CENTAURS NEVER STRAY VERY FAR FROM THEIR HERD...
...SO WE'D BEST BE FAR AWAY FROM HERE WHEN THE OTHERS SHOW UP TO AVENGE THEM.

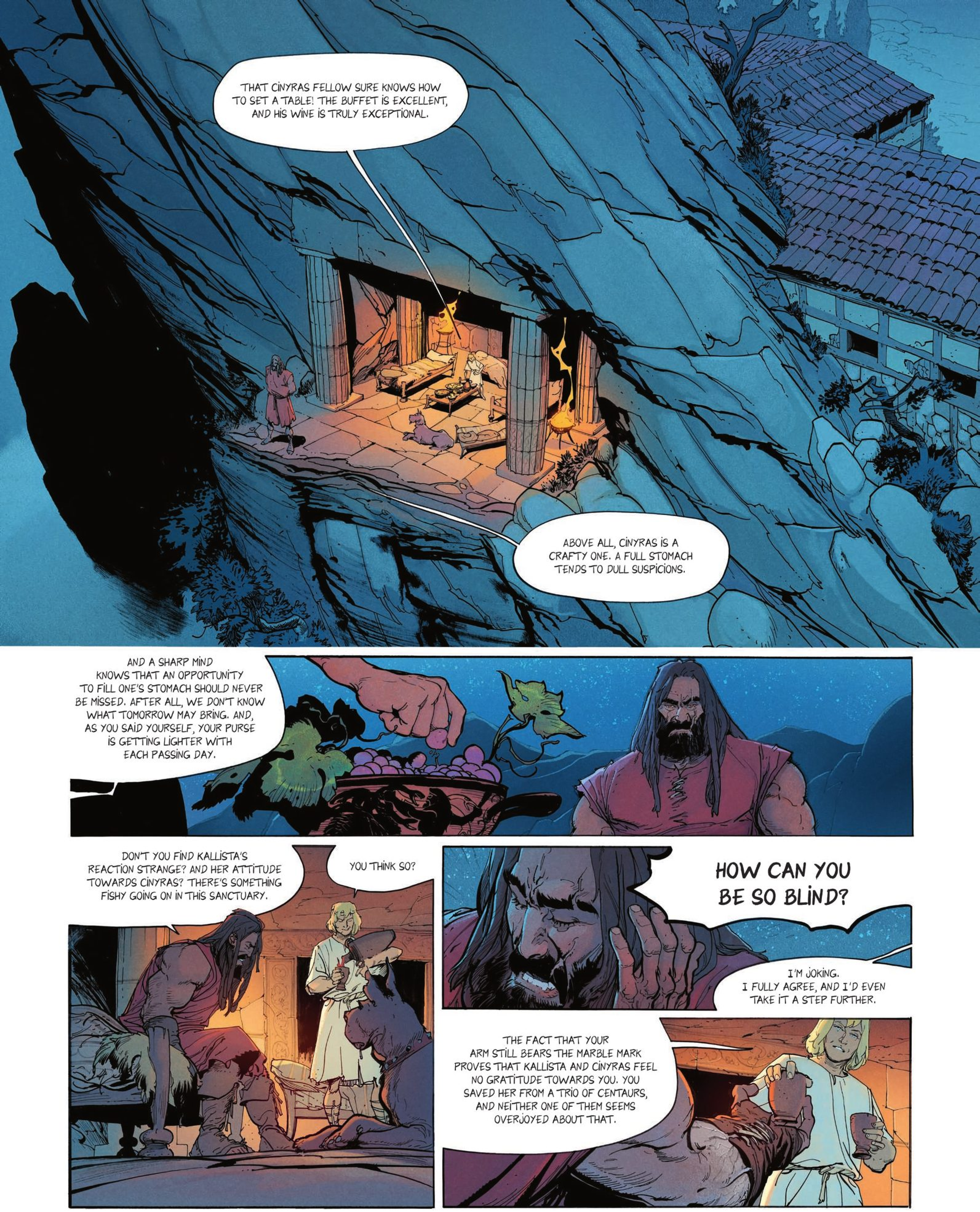

STILL AS DEADLY AS EVER, MY SON.
I SEE THAT YOU STILL SLAUGHTER THESE POOR CREATURES WITHOUT HESITATION.
FOR NOW, MY SON...
FOR NOW.

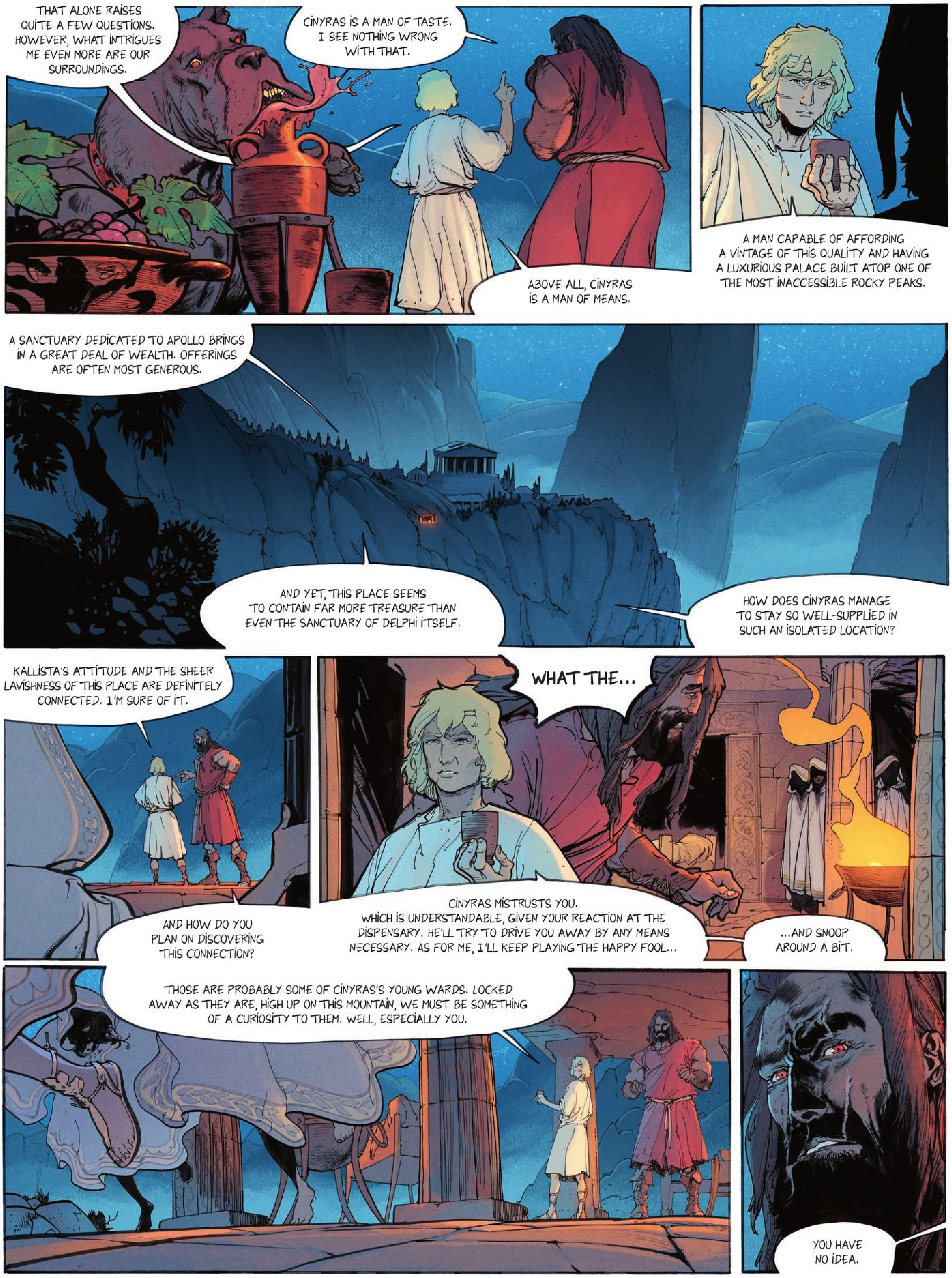

THE "NUBILE GIRLS OF THE THOUSAND STEPS"... DAMN DRUNKARDS.
I THOUGHT IT WAS ONLY A NICKNAME.
EUGENIOS, HURRY UP! WE'RE ALMOST THERE--ONLY A FEW STEPS TO GO.
ONLY A FEW STEPS... QUITE THE JESTER, THAT ONE.

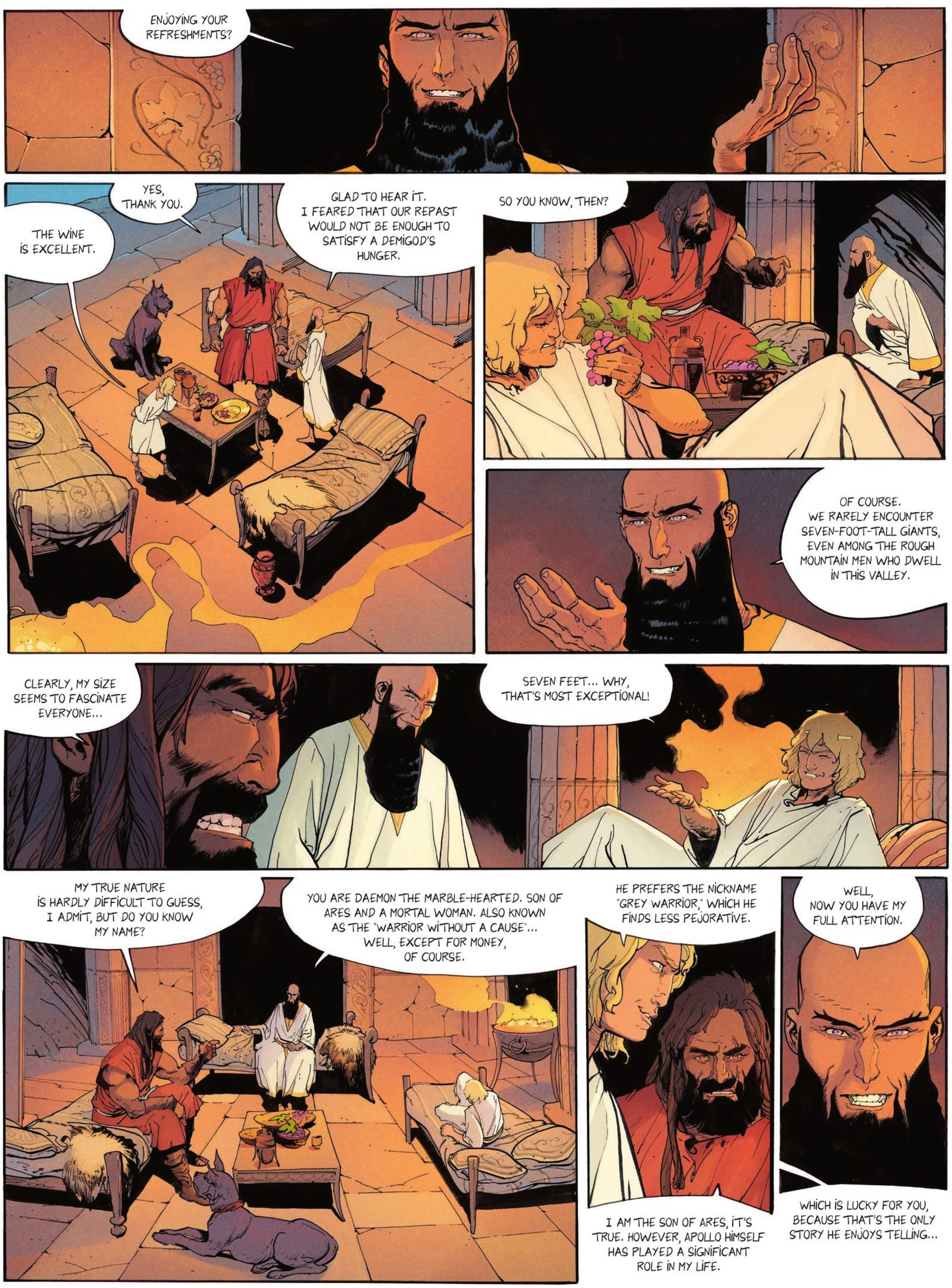

HALT!
YOU CANNOT ENTER WITH YOUR WEAPONS!
STOP RIGHT THERE!
LET US PASS! WE'RE BRINGING BACK ONE OF YOUR STUDENTS! SHE NEEDS A HEALER!
YOUR DISPENSARY!!! WHERE IS IT?!
YOUR WEAPONS! YOU MUST LEAVE YOUR...
MY COMPANION DOESN'T LIKE PARTING WITH HIS WEAPONS, BUT PERHAPS IF YOU WERE A BIT FIRMER...
IT'S KALLISTA! THEY'VE BROUGHT KALLISTA BACK! I'LL GO TELL CINYRAS!
GENTLY, NOW...
SHE'S WAKING UP! FETCH ME SOME WATER!

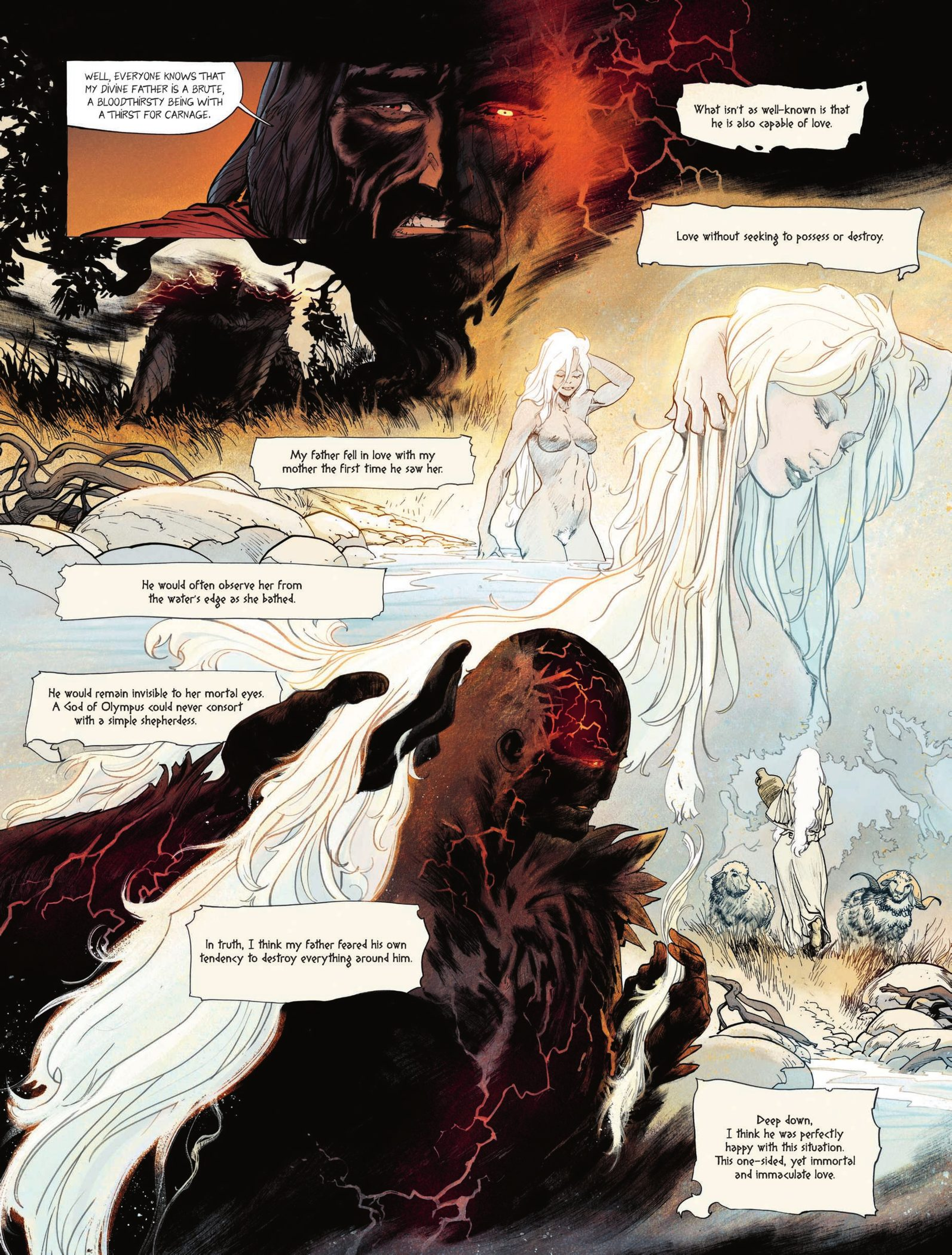

WATER... I'D BE HAPPY TO, BUT...
WH... WHERE...
WHERE AM I?
CALM DOWN, EVERYTHING'S FINE. YOU'RE IN NO DANGER.
WHERE AM I?
WE RESCUED YOU. WE'VE BROUGHT YOU BACK TO THE SANCTUARY. YOU'RE NO LONGER IN ANY DANGER.
THE SANCTUARY!!
YES, YOU'RE HOME. YOU CAN REST AND RECOVER.
YOU BROUGHT ME BACK TO THE SANCTUARY!!
SLOWLY, NOW... YOU HAVE ONE HELL OF A BRUISE ON YOUR SKULL... YOU SHOULDN'T GET UP SO QUICKLY.
YOU IMBECILES!!
UH...
KALLISTA!!
IS THIS ANY WAY TO THANK THE MEN WHO CAME TO YOUR RESCUE?

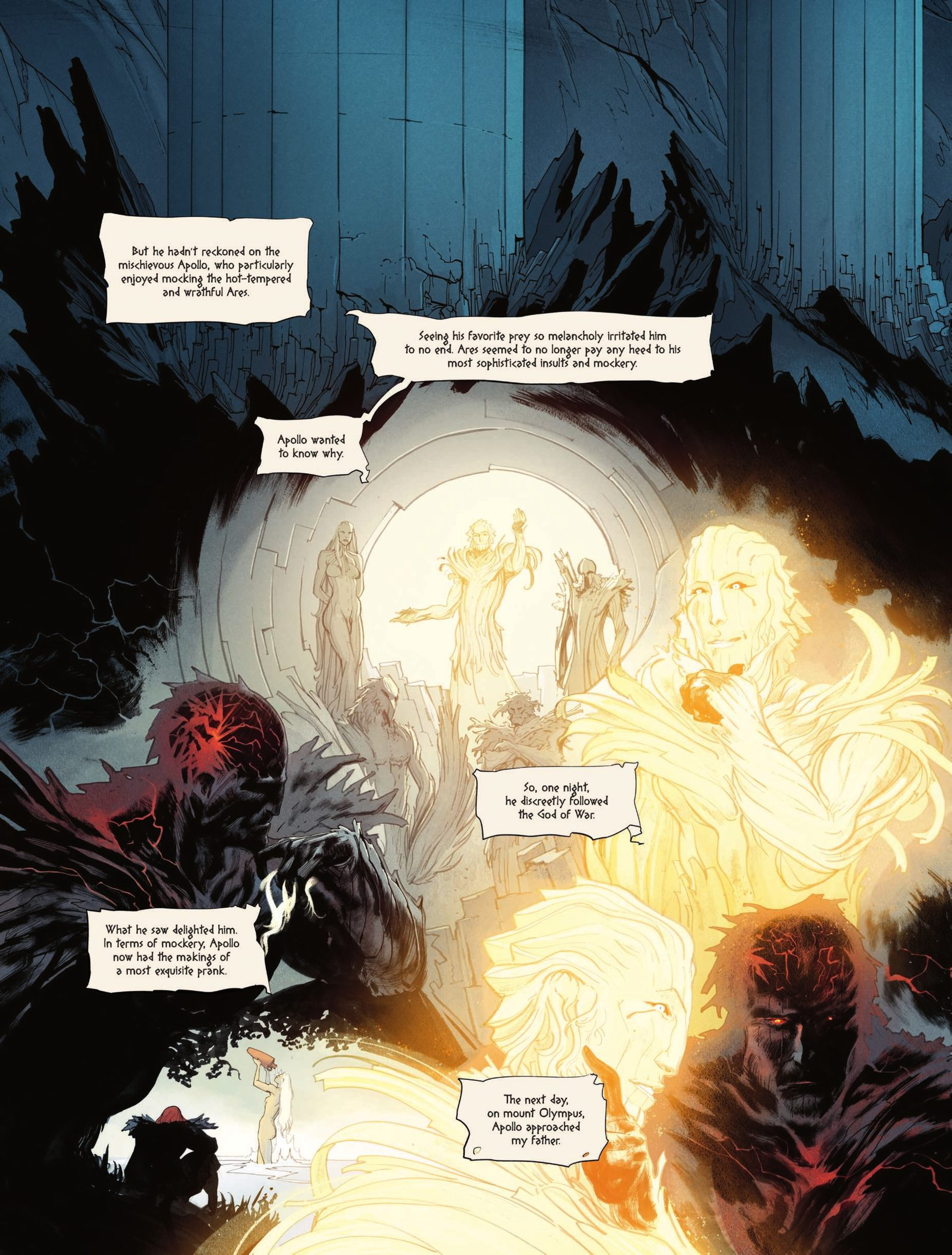

JUST LOOK AT WHAT THOSE SAVAGES DID TO YOU. YOU WERE FORTUNATE INDEED.
IT COULD HAVE BEEN FAR WORSE.
ESPECIALLY WITHOUT THE INTERVENTION OF OUR TWO HEROES.
MY FRIENDS, YOU MUST BE FAMISHED.
MY NAME IS CINRYAS, AND I OVERSEE THIS SANCTUARY DEDICATED TO APOLLO. I'VE HAD SOME REFRESHMENTS PREPARED FOR YOU.
HERE, ONE OF MY MEN WILL SHOW YOU THE WAY.
I... KALLISTA...
DON'T WORRY, I'LL TAKE CARE OF HER. I WILL JOIN YOU AS SOON AS I'VE FINISHED HERE.
I WANT TO SEE HER AGAIN ONCE SHE'S FEELING BETTER.
OF COURSE.

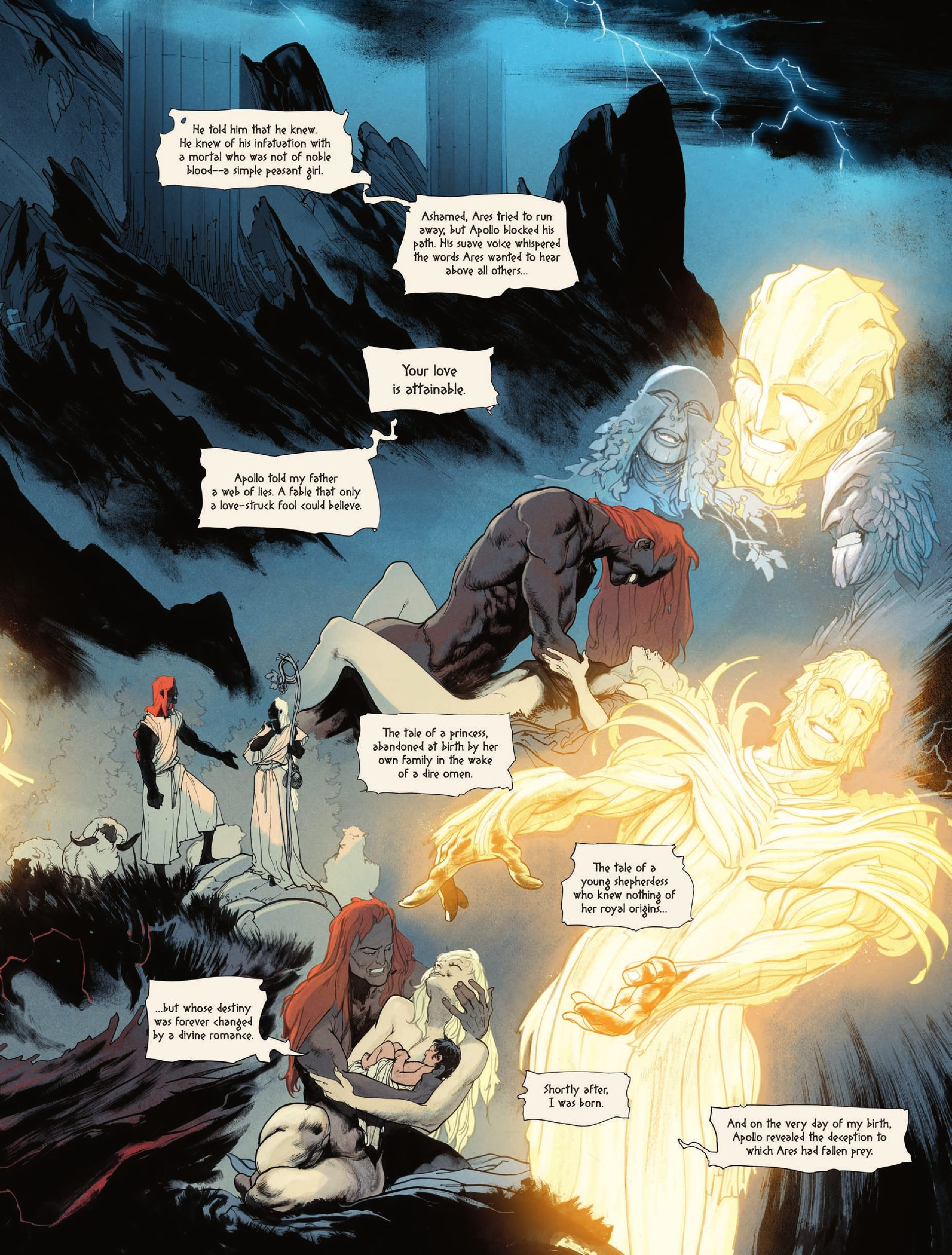

THAT CINYRAS FELLOW SURE KNOWS HOW TO SET A TABLE! THE BUFFET IS EXCELLENT, AND HIS WINE IS TRULY EXCEPTIONAL.
ABOVE ALL, CINYRAS IS A CRAFTY ONE. A FULL STOMACH TENDS TO DULL SUSPICIONS.
AND A SHARP MIND KNOWS THAT AN OPPORTUNITY TO FILL ONE'S STOMACH SHOULD NEVER BE MISSED. AFTER ALL, WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TOMORROW MAY BRING. AND, AS YOU SAID YOURSELF, YOUR PURSE IS GETTING LIGHTER WITH EACH PASSING DAY.
DON'T YOU FIND KALLISTA'S REACTION STRANGE? AND HER ATTITUDE TOWARDS CINYRAS? THERE'S SOMETHING FISHY GOING ON IN THIS SANCTUARY.
YOU THINK SO?
HOW CAN YOU BE SO BLIND?
I'M JOKING. I FULLY AGREE, AND I'D EVEN TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER.
THE FACT THAT YOUR ARM STILL BEARS THE MARBLE MARK PROVES THAT KALLISTA AND CINYRAS FEEL NO GRATITUDE TOWARDS YOU. YOU SAVED HER FROM A TRIO OF CENTAURS, AND NEITHER ONE OF THEM SEEMS OVERJOYED ABOUT THAT.

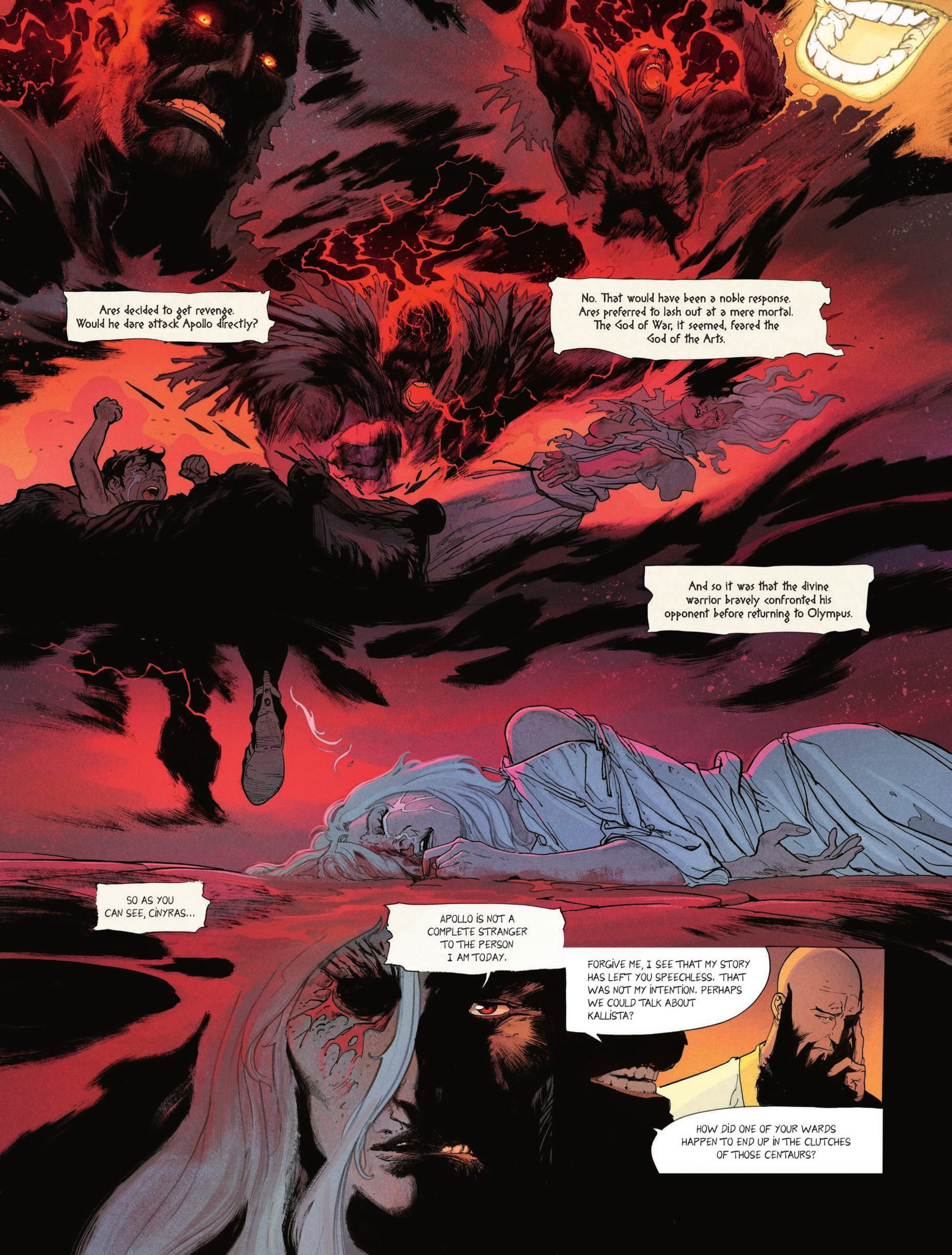

THAT ALONE RAISES QUITE A FEW QUESTIONS. HOWEVER, WHAT INTRIGUES ME EVEN MORE ARE OUR SURROUNDINGS.
CINYRAS IS A MAN OF TASTE. I SEE NOTHING WRONG WITH THAT.
ABOVE ALL, CINYRAS IS A MAN OF MEANS.
A MAN CAPABLE OF AFFORDING A VINTAGE OF THIS QUALITY AND HAVING A LUXURIOUS PALACE BUILT ATOP ONE OF THE MOST INACCESSIBLE ROCKY PEAKS.
A SANCTUARY DEDICATED TO APOLLO BRINGS IN A GREAT DEAL OF WEALTH. OFFERINGS ARE OFTEN MOST GENEROUS.
AND YET, THIS PLACE SEEMS TO CONTAIN FAR MORE TREASURE THAN EVEN THE SANCTUARY OF DELPHI ITSELF.
HOW DOES CINYRAS MANAGE TO STAY SO WELL-SUPPLIED IN SUCH AN ISOLATED LOCATION?
KALLISTA'S ATTITUDE AND THE SHEER LAVISHNESS OF THIS PLACE ARE DEFINITELY CONNECTED. I'M SURE OF IT.
AND HOW DO YOU PLAN ON DISCOVERING THIS CONNECTION?
WHAT THE...
CINYRAS MISTRUSTS YOU. WHICH IS UNDERSTANDABLE, GIVEN YOUR REACTION AT THE DISPENSARY. HE'LL TRY TO DRIVE YOU AWAY BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY. AS FOR ME, I'LL KEEP PLAYING THE HAPPY FOOL...
...AND SNOOP AROUND A BIT.
THOSE ARE PROBABLY SOME OF CINYRAS'S YOUNG WARDS. LOCKED AWAY AS THEY ARE, HIGH UP ON THIS MOUNTAIN, WE MUST BE SOMETHING OF A CURIOSITY TO THEM. WELL, ESPECIALLY YOU.
YOU HAVE NO IDEA.

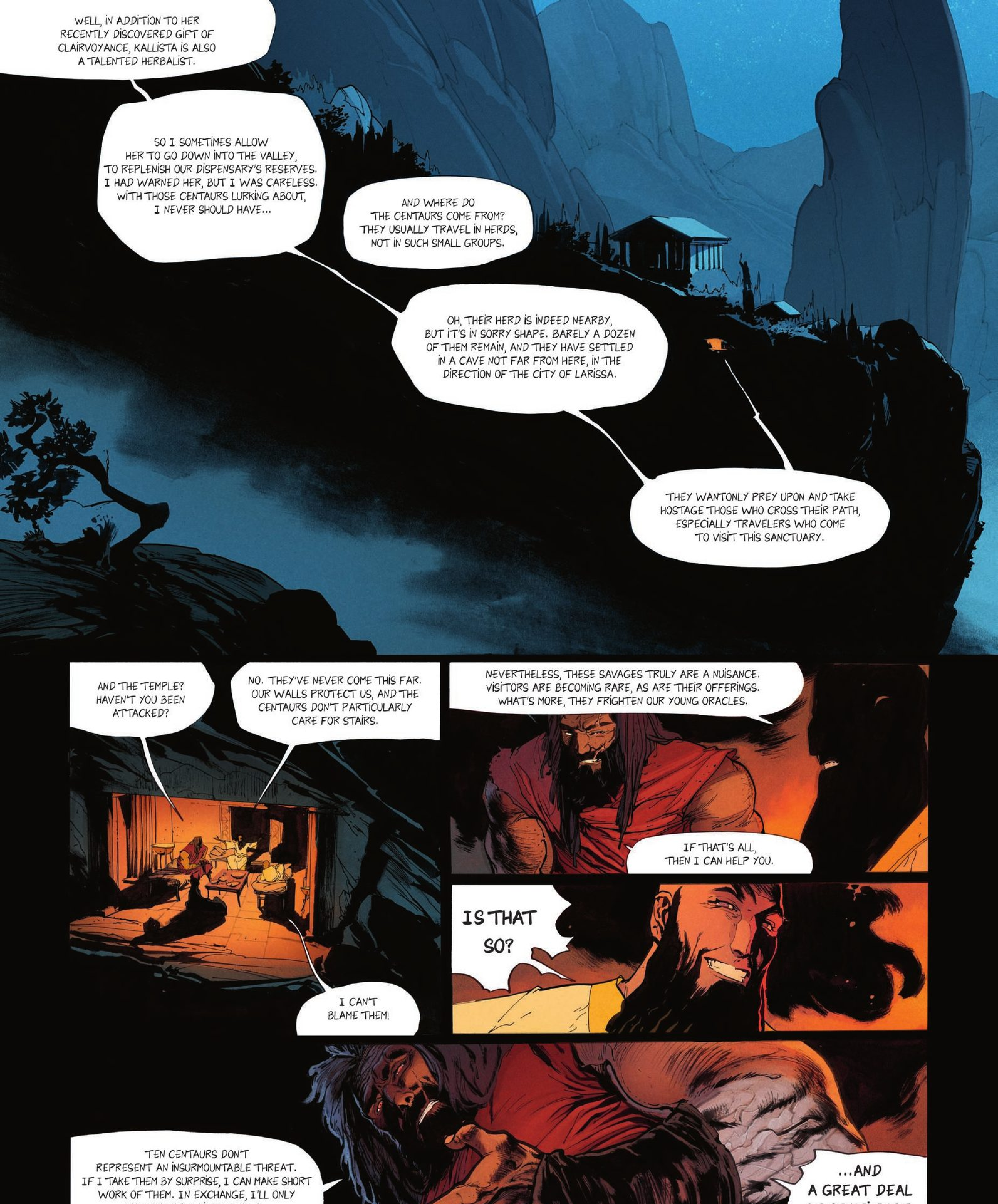

ENJOYING YOUR REFRESHMENTS?
YES, THANK YOU.
THE WINE IS EXCELLENT.
GLAD TO HEAR IT. I FEARED THAT OUR REPAST WOULD NOT BE ENOUGH TO SATISFY A DEMIGOD'S HUNGER.
SO YOU KNOW, THEN?
OF COURSE. WE RARELY ENCOUNTER SEVEN-FOOT-TALL GIANTS, EVEN AMONG THE ROUGH MOUNTAIN MEN WHO DWELL IN THIS VALLEY.
CLEARLY, MY SIZE SEEMS TO FASCINATE EVERYONE...
SEVEN FEET... WHY, THAT'S MOST EXCEPTIONAL!
MY TRUE NATURE IS HARDLY DIFFICULT TO GUESS, I ADMIT, BUT DO YOU KNOW MY NAME?
YOU ARE DAEMON THE MARBLE-HEARTED. SON OF ARES AND A MORTAL WOMAN. ALSO KNOWN AS THE "WARRIOR WITHOUT A CAUSE"... WELL, EXCEPT FOR MONEY, OF COURSE.
HE PREFERS THE NICKNAME "GREY WARRIOR," WHICH HE FINDS LESS PEJORATIVE.
I AM THE SON OF ARES, IT'S TRUE. HOWEVER, APOLLO HIMSELF HAS PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN MY LIFE.
WELL, NOW YOU HAVE MY FULL ATTENTION.
WHICH IS LUCKY FOR YOU, BECAUSE THAT'S THE ONLY STORY HE ENJOYS TELLING...

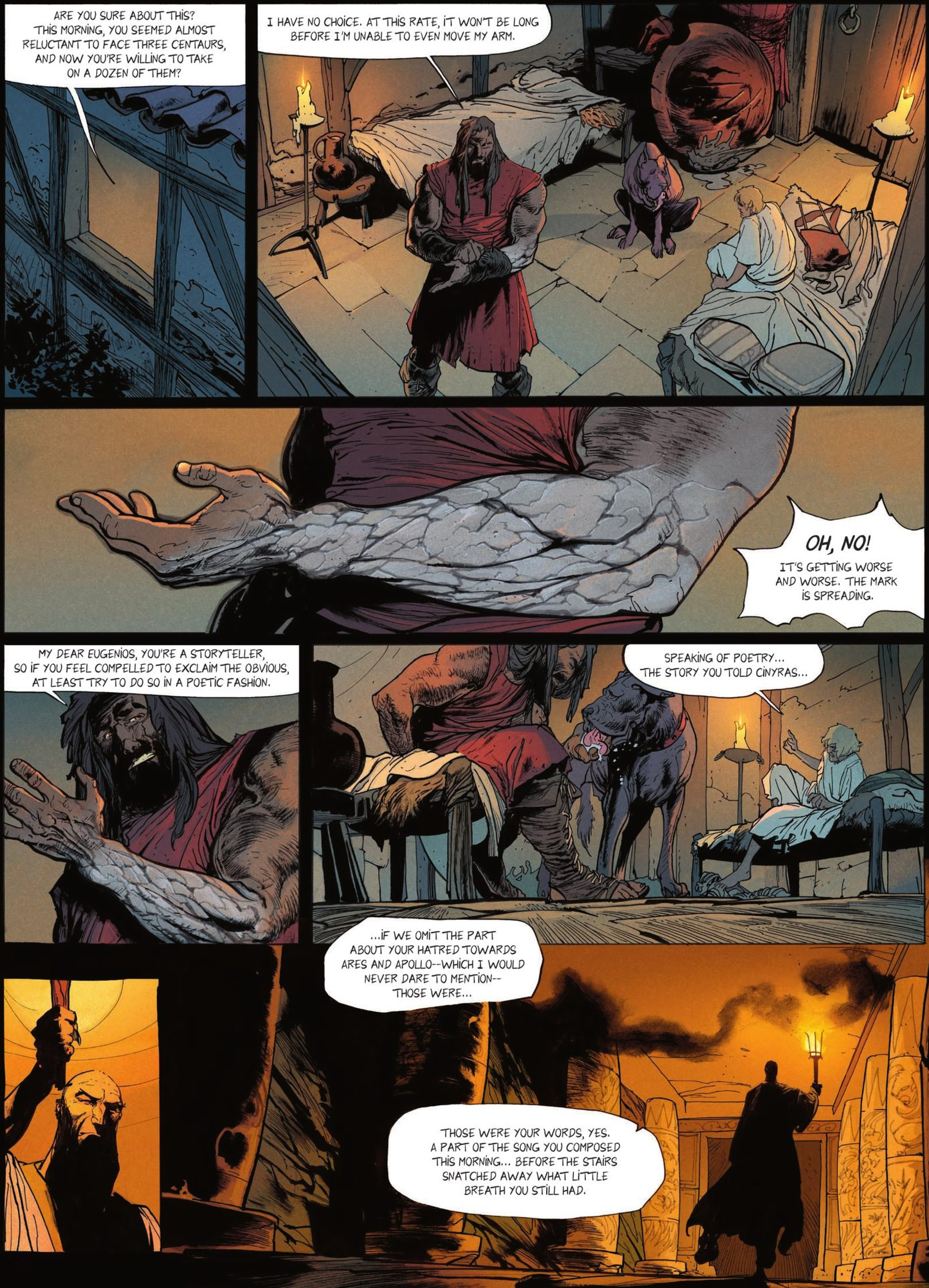

WELL, EVERYONE KNOWS THAT MY DIVINE FATHER IS A BRUTE, A BLOODTHIRSTY BEING WITH A THIRST FOR CARNAGE.
What isn't as well-known is that he is also capable of love.
Love without seeking to possess or destroy.
My father fell in love with my mother the first time he saw her.
He would often observe her from the water's edge as she bathed.
He would remain invisible to her mortal eyes. A God of Olympus could never consort with a simple shepherdess.
In truth, I think my father feared his own tendency to destroy everything around him.
Deep down, I think he was perfectly happy with this situation. This one-sided, yet immortal and immaculate love.

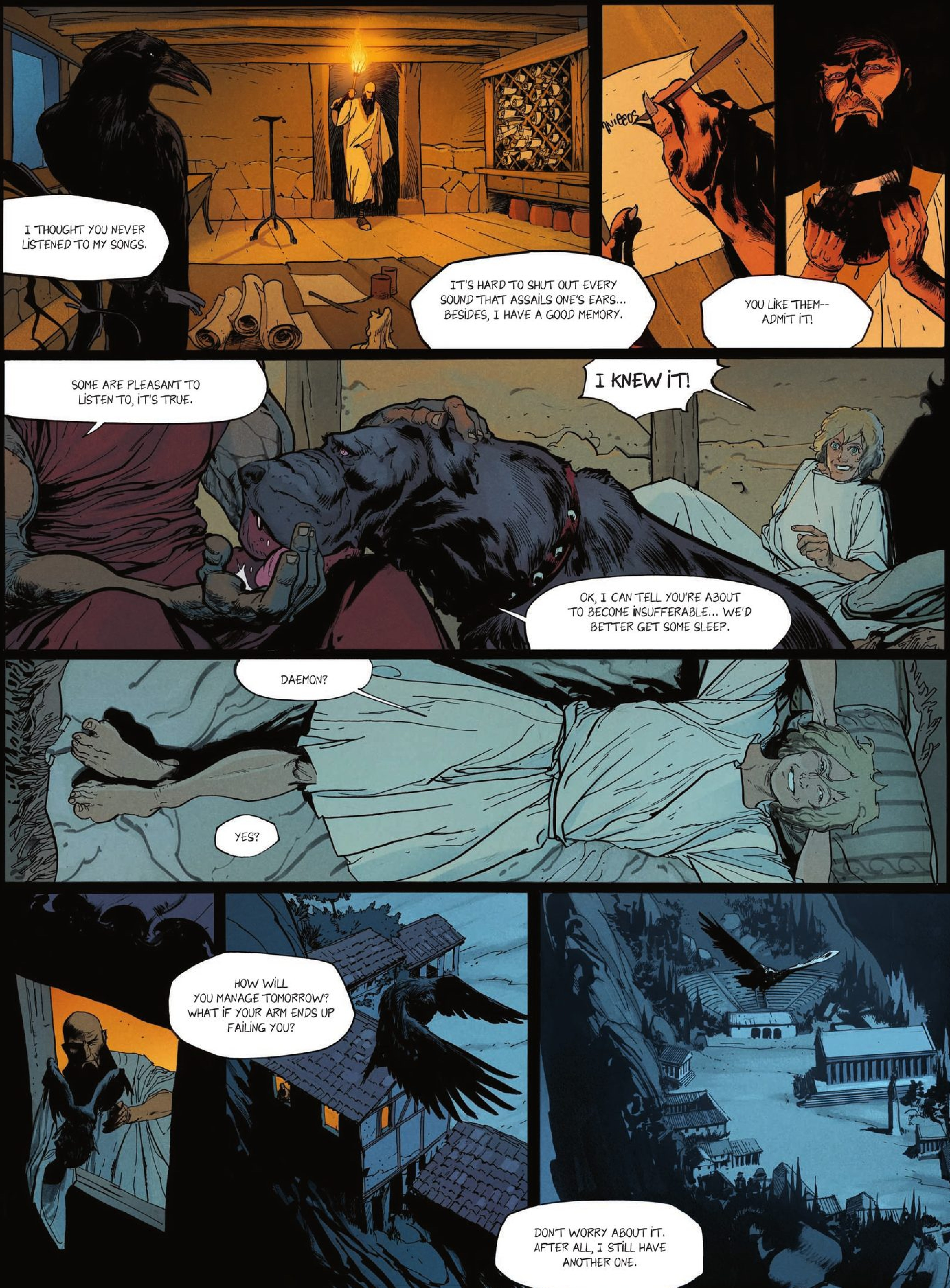

But he hadn't reckoned on the mischievous Apollo, who particularly enjoyed mocking the hot-tempered and wrathful Ares.
Seeing his favorite prey so melancholy irritated him to no end. Ares seemed to no longer pay any heed to his most sophisticated insults and mockery.
Apollo wanted to know why.
So, one night, he discreetly followed the God of War.
What he saw delighted him. In terms of mockery, Apollo now had the makings of a most exquisite prank.
The next day, on mount Olympus, Apollo approached my father.

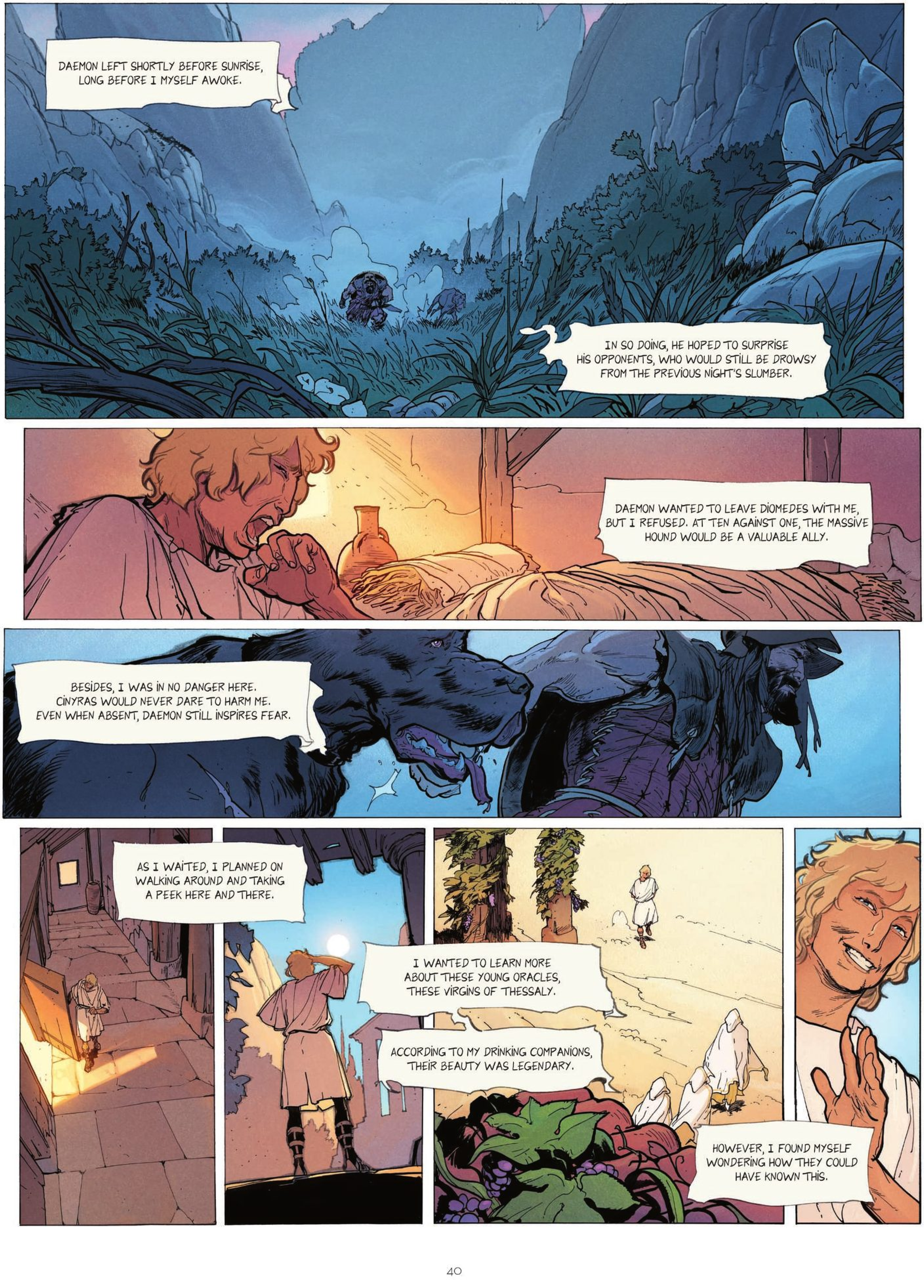

He told him that he knew. He knew of his infatuation with a mortal who was not of noble blood--a simple peasant girl.
Ashamed, Ares tried to run away, but Apollo blocked his path. His suave voice whispered the words Ares wanted to hear above all others...
Your love is attainable.
Apollo told my father a web of lies. A fable that only a love-struck fool could believe.
The tale of a princess, abandoned at birth by her own family in the wake of a dire omen.
The tale of a young shepherdess who knew nothing of her royal origins...
...but whose destiny was forever changed by a divine romance.
Shortly after, I was born.
And on the very day of my birth, Apollo revealed the deception to which Ares had fallen prey.

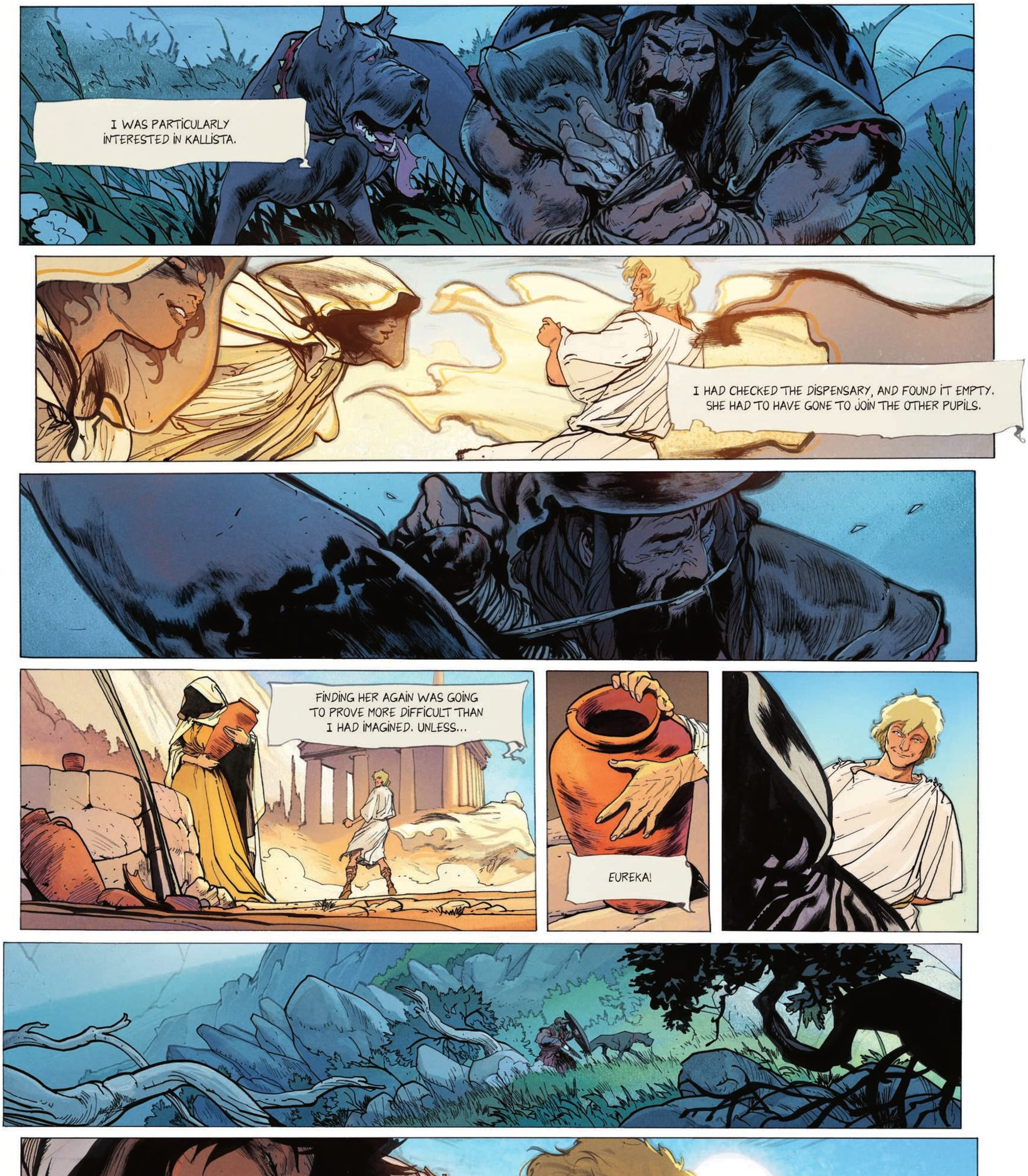

Ares decided to get revenge. Would he dare attack Apollo directly?
No. That would have been a noble response. Ares preferred to lash out at a mere mortal. The God of War, it seemed, feared the God of the Arts.
And so it was that the divine warrior bravely confronted his opponent before returning to Olympus.
SO AS YOU CAN SEE, CINYRAS...
APOLLO IS NOT A COMPLETE STRANGER TO THE PERSON I AM TODAY.
FORGIVE ME, I SEE THAT MY STORY HAS LEFT YOU SPEECHLESS. THAT WAS NOT MY INTENTION. PERHAPS WE COULD TALK ABOUT KALLISTA?
HOW DID ONE OF YOUR WARDS HAPPEN TO END UP IN THE CLUTCHES OF THOSE CENTAURS?

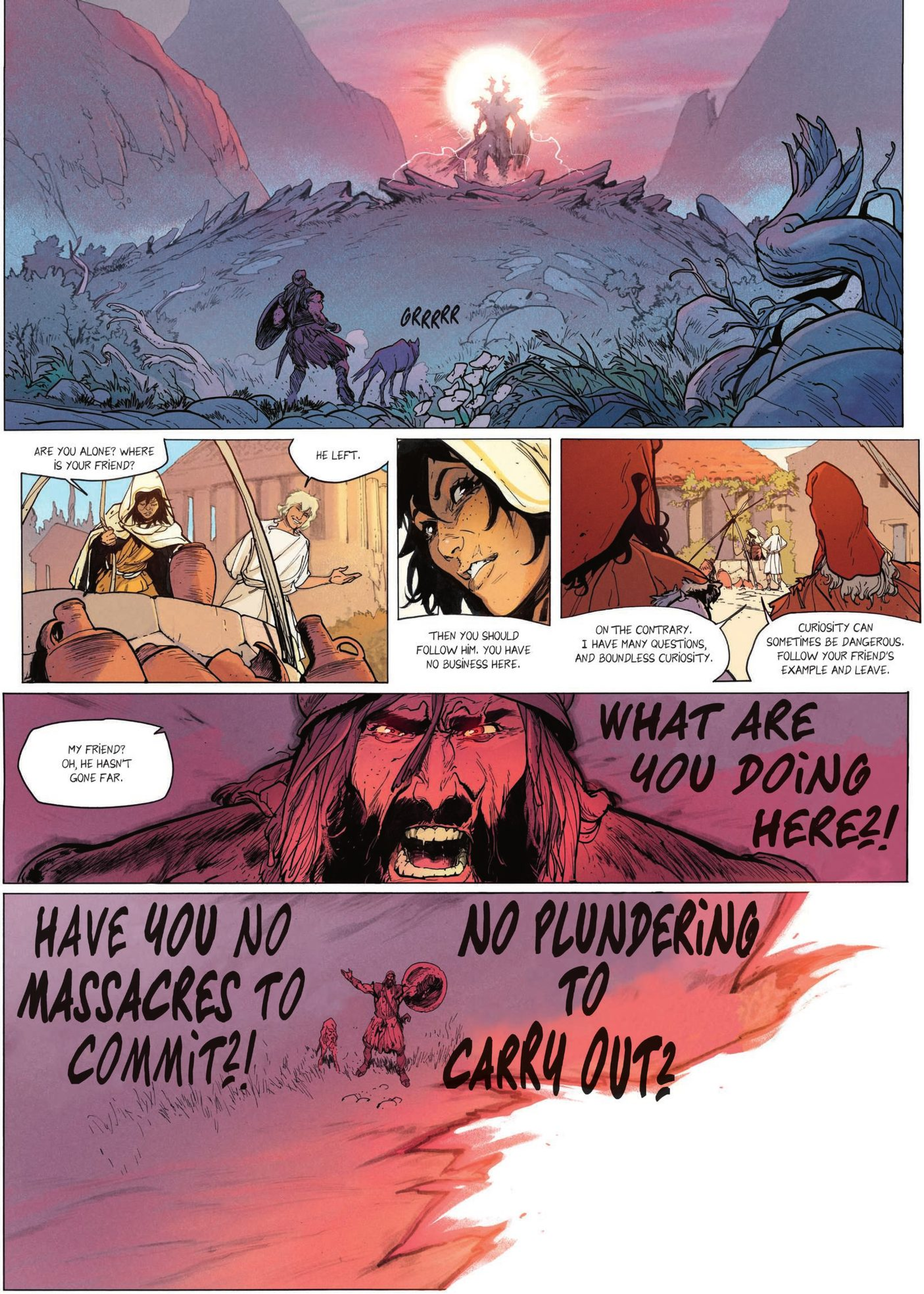

WELL, IN ADDITION TO HER RECENTLY DISCOVERED GIFT OF CLAIRVOYANCE, KALLISTA IS ALSO A TALENTED HERBALIST.
SO I SOMETIMES ALLOW HER TO GO DOWN INTO THE VALLEY, TO REPLENISH OUR DISPENSARY'S RESERVES. I HAD WARNED HER, BUT I WAS CARELESS. WITH THOSE CENTAURS LURKING ABOUT, I NEVER SHOULD HAVE...
AND WHERE DO THE CENTAURS COME FROM? THEY USUALLY TRAVEL IN HERDS, NOT IN SUCH SMALL GROUPS.
OH, THEIR HERD IS INDEED NEARBY, BUT IT'S IN SORRY SHAPE. BARELY A DOZEN OF THEM REMAIN, AND THEY HAVE SETTLED IN A CAVE NOT FAR FROM HERE, IN THE DIRECTION OF THE CITY OF LARISSA.
THEY WANTONLY PREY UPON AND TAKE HOSTAGE THOSE WHO CROSS THEIR PATH, ESPECIALLY TRAVELERS WHO COME TO VISIT THIS SANCTUARY.
AND THE TEMPLE? HAVEN'T YOU BEEN ATTACKED?
NO. THEY'VE NEVER COME THIS FAR. OUR WALLS PROTECT US, AND THE CENTAURS DON'T PARTICULARLY CARE FOR STAIRS.
I CAN'T BLAME THEM!
NEVERTHELESS, THESE SAVAGES TRULY ARE A NUISANCE. VISITORS ARE BECOMING RARE, AS ARE THEIR OFFERINGS. WHAT'S MORE, THEY FRIGHTEN OUR YOUNG ORACLES.
IF THAT'S ALL, THEN I CAN HELP YOU.
IS THAT SO?
TEN CENTAURS DON'T REPRESENT AN INSURMOUNTABLE THREAT. IF I TAKE THEM BY SURPRISE, I CAN MAKE SHORT WORK OF THEM. IN EXCHANGE, I'LL ONLY ASK YOU FOR A LITTLE GOLD...
...AND A GREAT DEAL OF GRATITUDE.

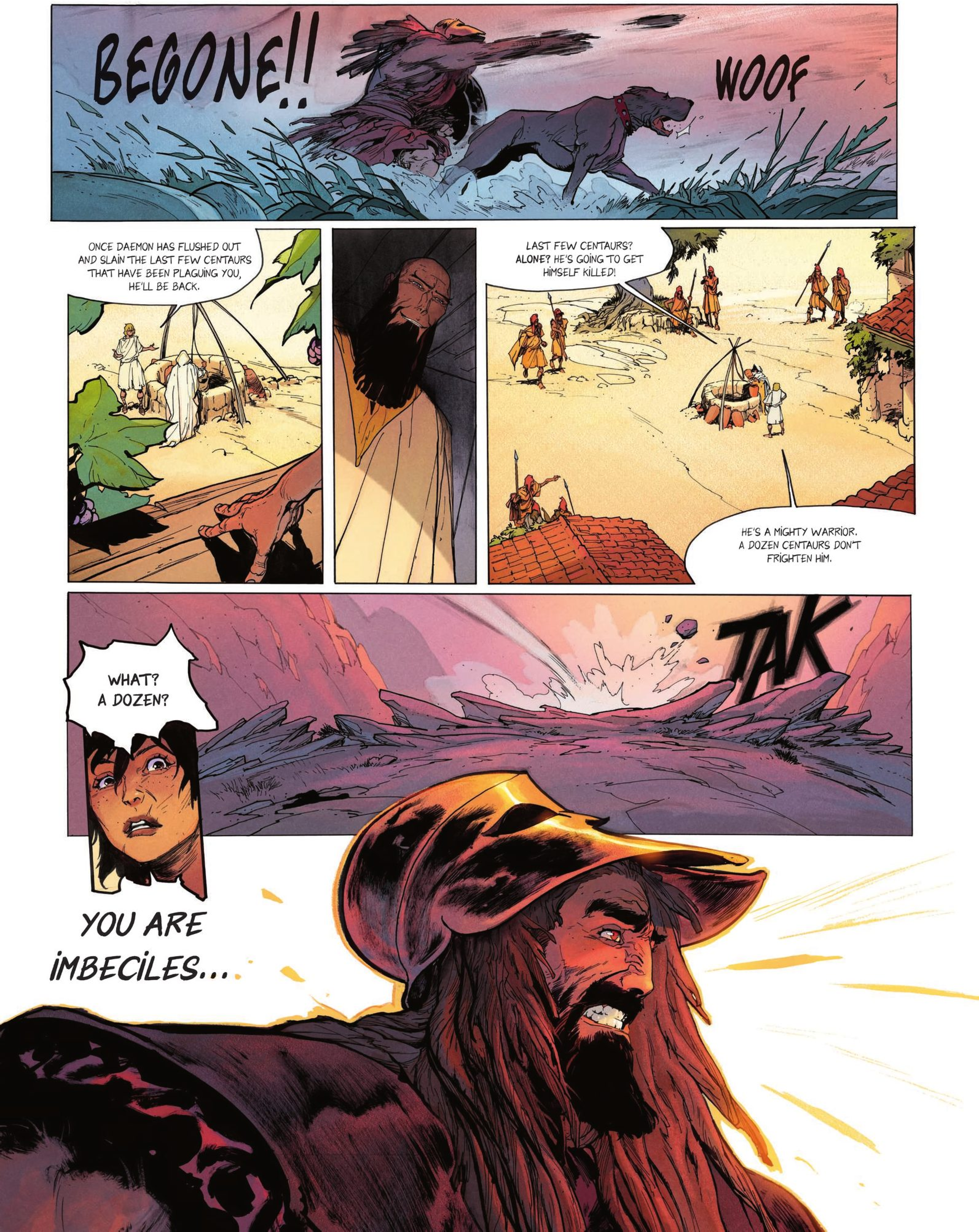

ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THIS? THIS MORNING, YOU SEEMED ALMOST RELUCTANT TO FACE THREE CENTAURS, AND NOW YOU'RE WILLING TO TAKE ON A DOZEN OF THEM?
I HAVE NO CHOICE. AT THIS RATE, IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE I'M UNABLE TO EVEN MOVE MY ARM.
OH, NO! IT'S GETTING WORSE AND WORSE. THE MARK IS SPREADING.
MY DEAR EUGENIOS, YOU'RE A STORYTELLER, SO IF YOU FEEL COMPELLED TO EXCLAIM THE OBVIOUS, AT LEAST TRY TO DO SO IN A POETIC FASHION.
SPEAKING OF POETRY... THE STORY YOU TOLD CINYRAS...
...IF WE OMIT THE PART ABOUT YOUR HATRED TOWARDS ARES AND APOLLO--WHICH I WOULD NEVER DARE TO MENTION--THOSE WERE...
THOSE WERE YOUR WORDS, YES. A PART OF THE SONG YOU COMPOSED THIS MORNING... BEFORE THE STAIRS SNATCHED AWAY WHAT LITTLE BREATH YOU STILL HAD.

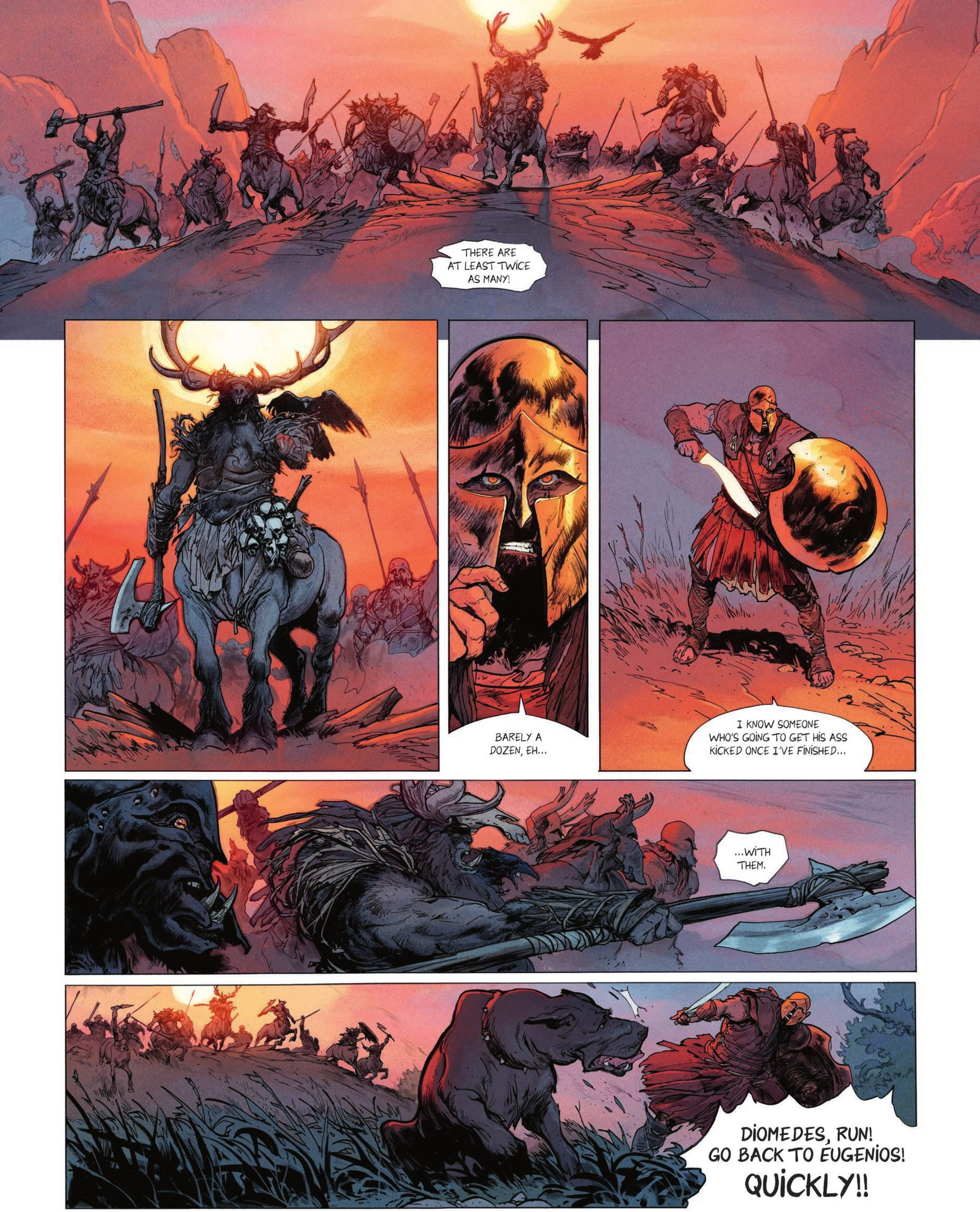

I THOUGHT YOU NEVER LISTENED TO MY SONGS.
IT'S HARD TO SHUT OUT EVERY SOUND THAT ASSAILS ONE'S EARS... BESIDES, I HAVE A GOOD MEMORY.
YOU LIKE THEM-- ADMIT IT!
SOME ARE PLEASANT TO LISTEN TO, IT'S TRUE.
I KNEW IT!
OK, I CAN TELL YOU'RE ABOUT TO BECOME INSUFFERABLE... WE'D BETTER GET SOME SLEEP.
DAEMON?
YES?
HOW WILL YOU MANAGE TOMORROW? WHAT IF YOUR ARM ENDS UP FAILING YOU?
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. AFTER ALL, I STILL HAVE ANOTHER ONE.

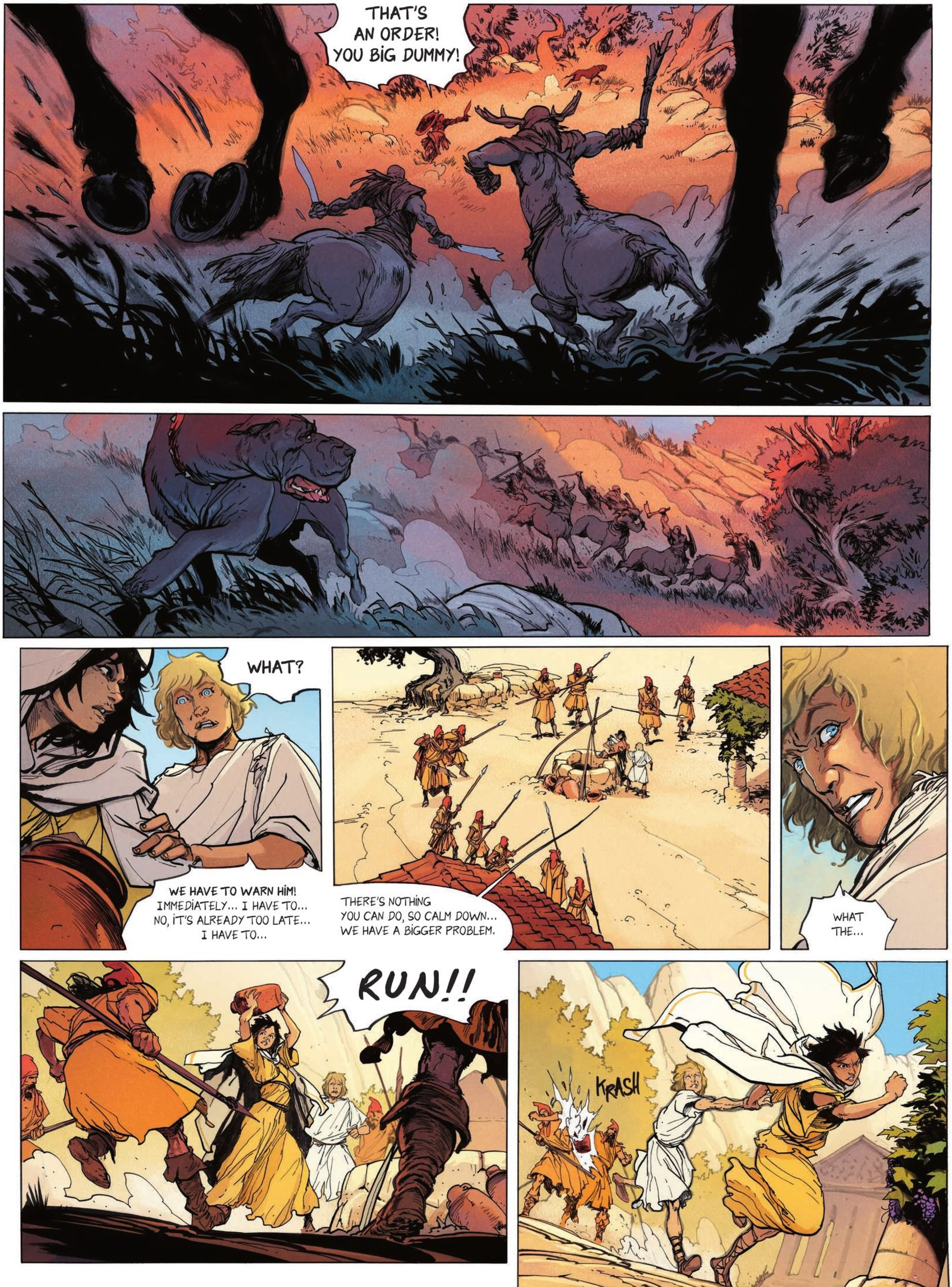

DAEMON LEFT SHORTLY BEFORE SUNRISE, LONG BEFORE I MYSELF AWOKE.
IN SO DOING, HE HOPED TO SURPRISE HIS OPPONENTS, WHO WOULD STILL BE DROWSY FROM THE PREVIOUS NIGHT'S SLUMBER.
DAEMON WANTED TO LEAVE DIOMEDES WITH ME, BUT I REFUSED. AT TEN AGAINST ONE, THE MASSIVE HOUND WOULD BE A VALUABLE ALLY.
BESIDES, I WAS IN NO DANGER HERE. CINYRAS WOULD NEVER DARE TO HARM ME. EVEN WHEN ABSENT, DAEMON STILL INSPIRES FEAR.
AS I WAITED, I PLANNED ON WALKING AROUND AND TAKING A PEEK HERE AND THERE.
I WANTED TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THESE YOUNG ORACLES, THESE VIRGINS OF THESSALY.
ACCORDING TO MY DRINKING COMPANIONS, THEIR BEAUTY WAS LEGENDARY.
HOWEVER, I FOUND MYSELF WONDERING HOW THEY COULD HAVE KNOWN THIS.

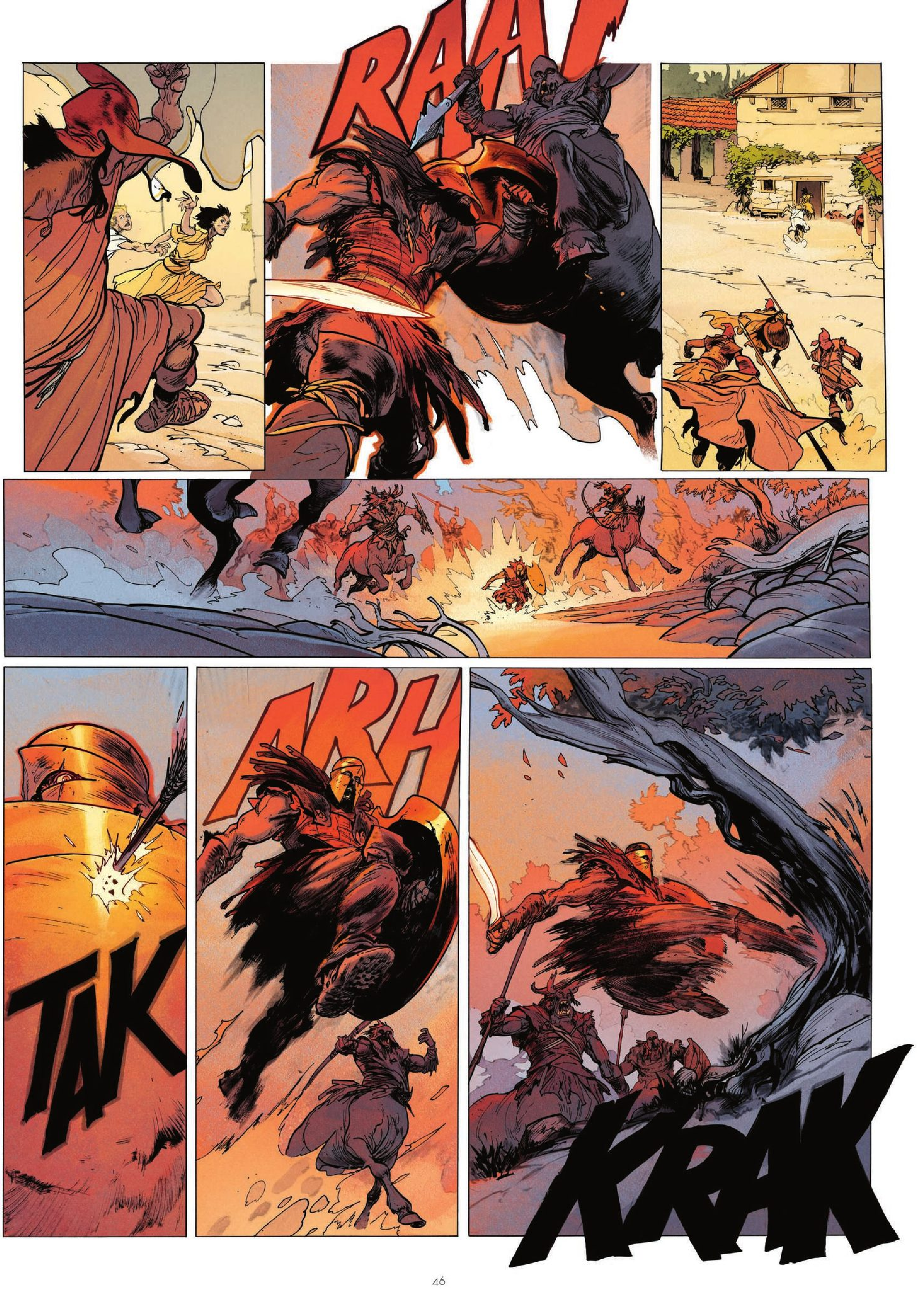

I WAS PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN KALLISTA.
I HAD CHECKED THE DISPENSARY, AND FOUND IT EMPTY. SHE HAD TO HAVE GONE TO JOIN THE OTHER PUPILS.
FINDING HER AGAIN WAS GOING TO PROVE MORE DIFFICULT THAN I HAD IMAGINED. UNLESS...
EUREKA!
HELLO, KALLISTA.

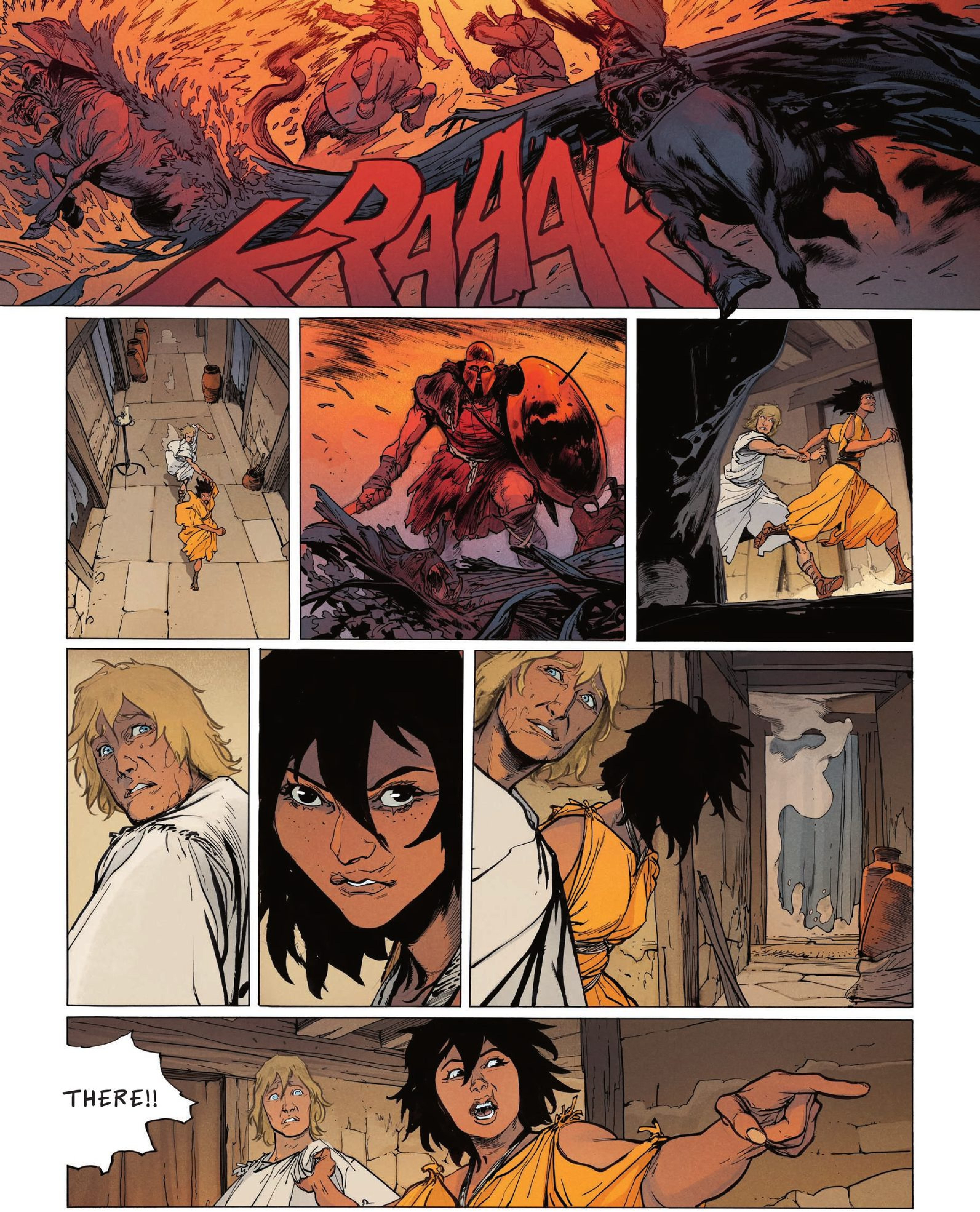

GRRRRR
ARE YOU ALONE? WHERE IS YOUR FRIEND?
HE LEFT.
THEN YOU SHOULD FOLLOW HIM. YOU HAVE NO BUSINESS HERE.
ON THE CONTRARY. I HAVE MANY QUESTIONS, AND BOUNDLESS CURIOSITY.
CURIOSITY CAN SOMETIMES BE DANGEROUS. FOLLOW YOUR FRIEND'S EXAMPLE AND LEAVE.
MY FRIEND? OH, HE HASN'T GONE FAR.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?!
HAVE YOU NO MASSACRES TO COMMIT?!
NO PLUNDERING TO CARRY OUT?

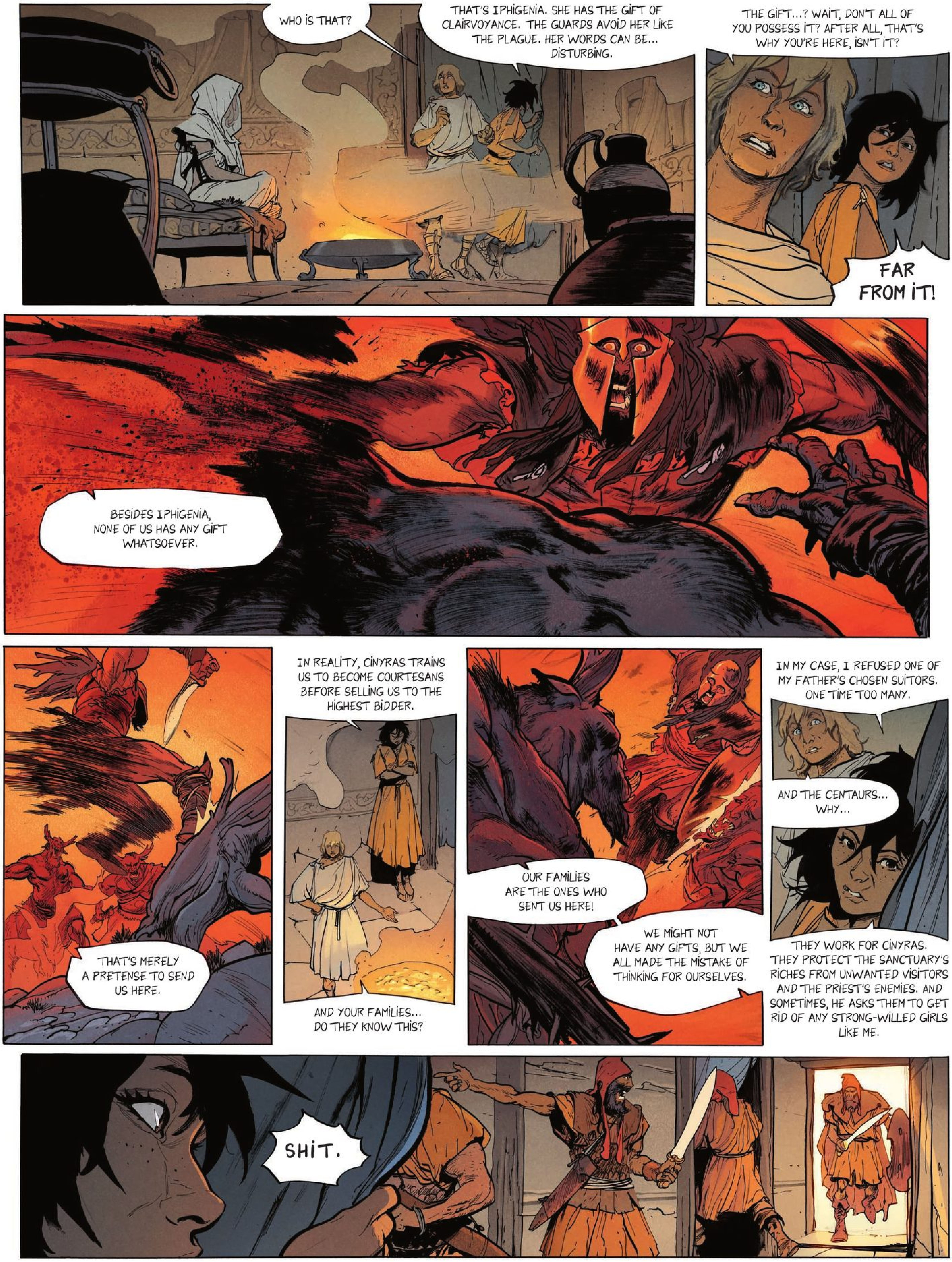

BEGONE!!
WOOF
ONCE DAEMON HAS FLUSHED OUT AND SLAIN THE LAST FEW CENTAURS THAT HAVE BEEN PLAGUING YOU, HE'LL BE BACK.
LAST FEW CENTAURS? **ALONE?** HE'S GOING TO GET HIMSELF KILLED!
HE'S A MIGHTY WARRIOR. A DOZEN CENTAURS DON'T FRIGHTEN HIM.
WHAT? A DOZEN?
TAK
YOU ARE IMBECILES...

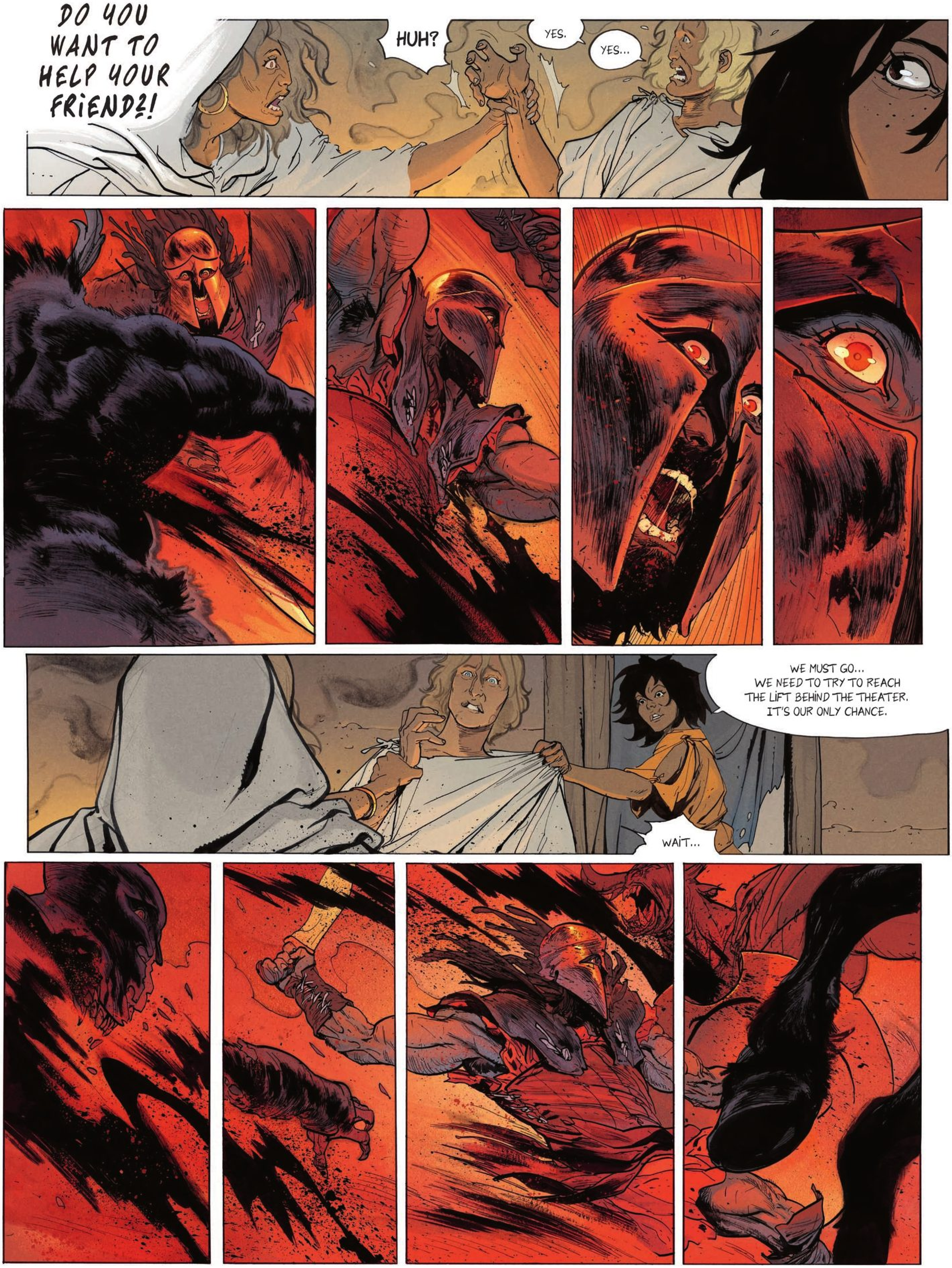

THERE ARE AT LEAST TWICE AS MANY!
BARELY A DOZEN, EH...
I KNOW SOMEONE WHO'S GOING TO GET HIS ASS KICKED ONCE I'VE FINISHED...
...WITH THEM.
DIOMEDES, RUN! GO BACK TO EUGENIOS! QUICKLY!!

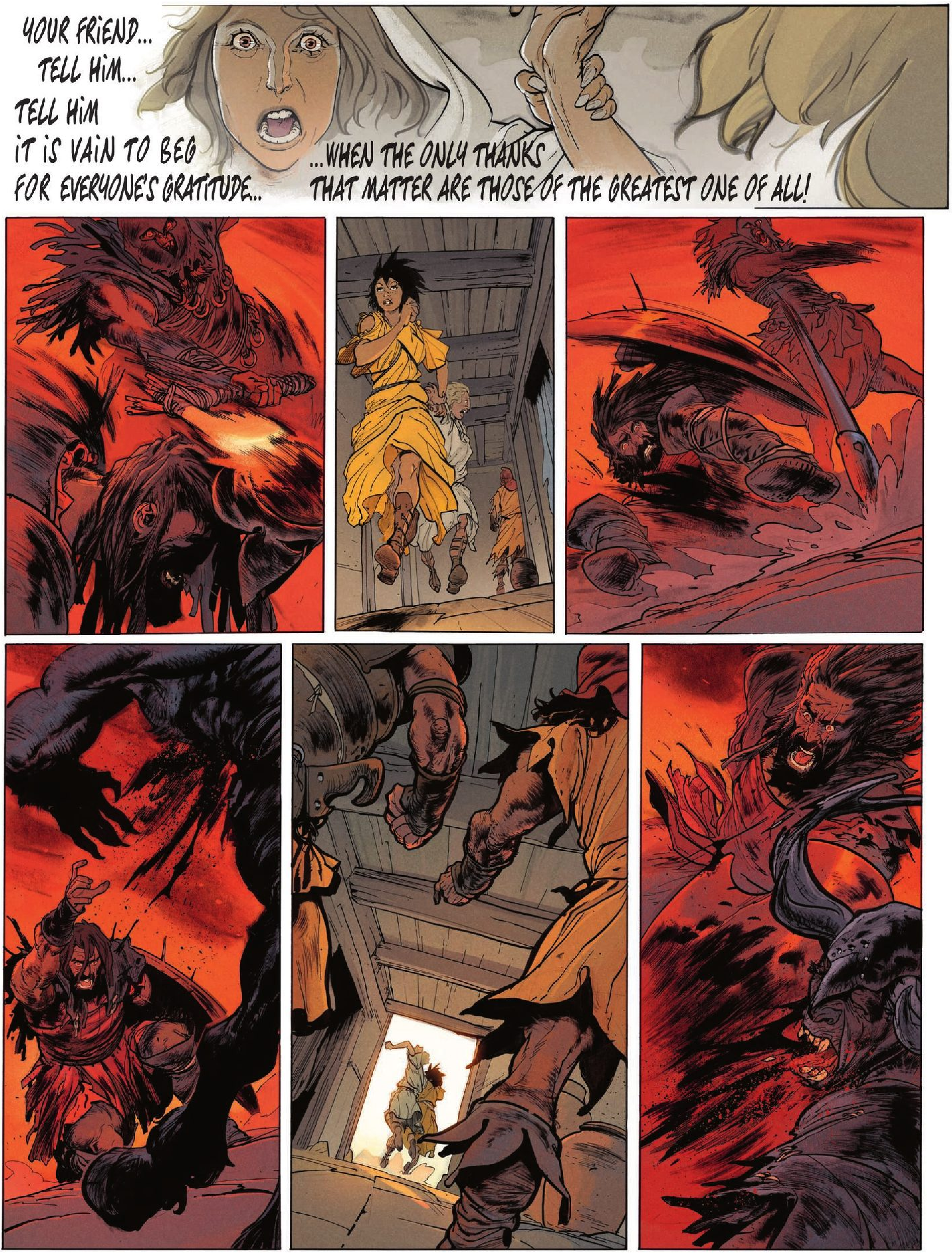

THAT'S AN ORDER! YOU BIG DUMMY!
WHAT?
WE HAVE TO WARN HIM! IMMEDIATELY... I HAVE TO... NO, IT'S ALREADY TOO LATE... I HAVE TO...
THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO, SO CALM DOWN... WE HAVE A BIGGER PROBLEM.
WHAT THE...
RUN!!
KRASH

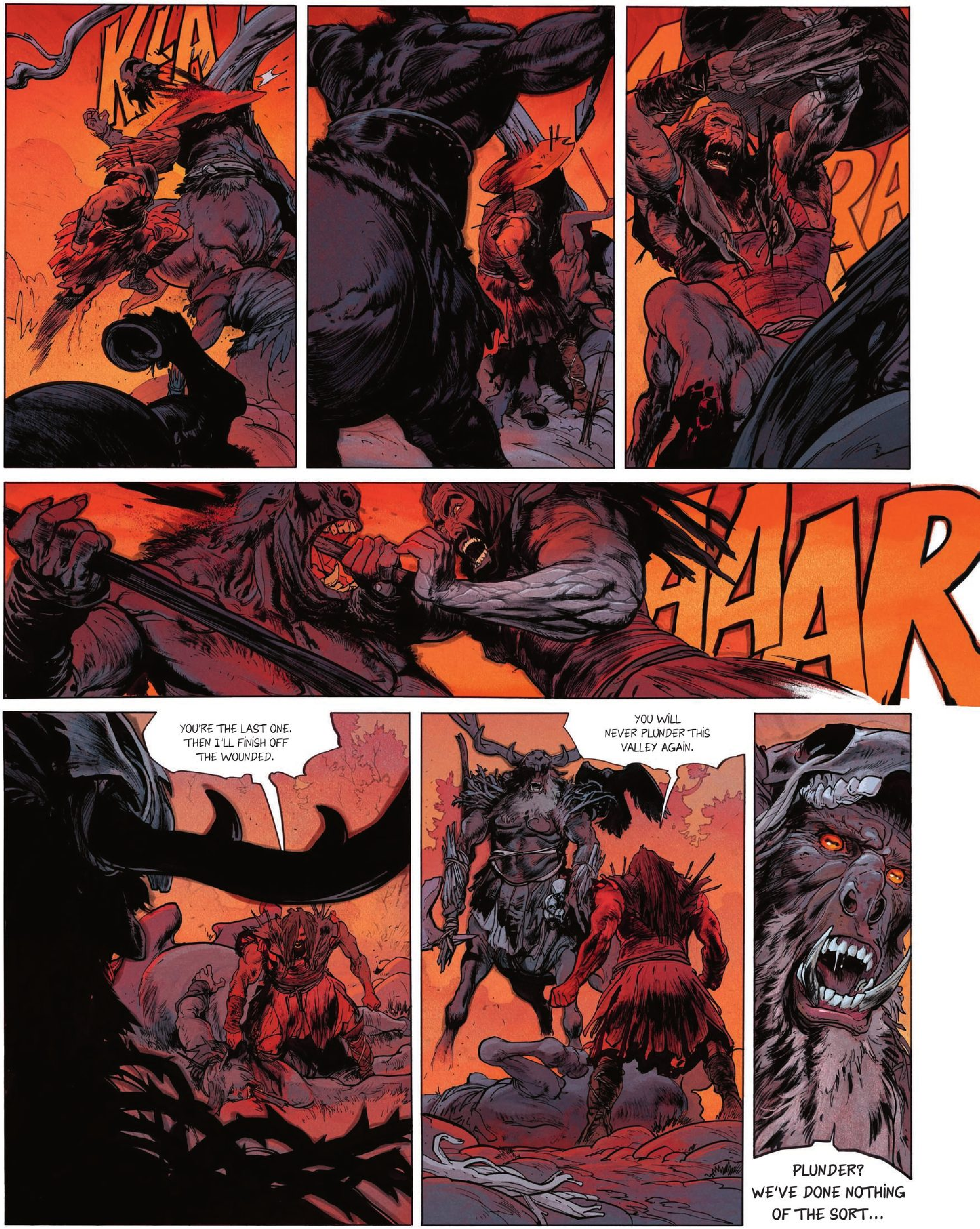

RAA!
TAK
ARH
KRAK

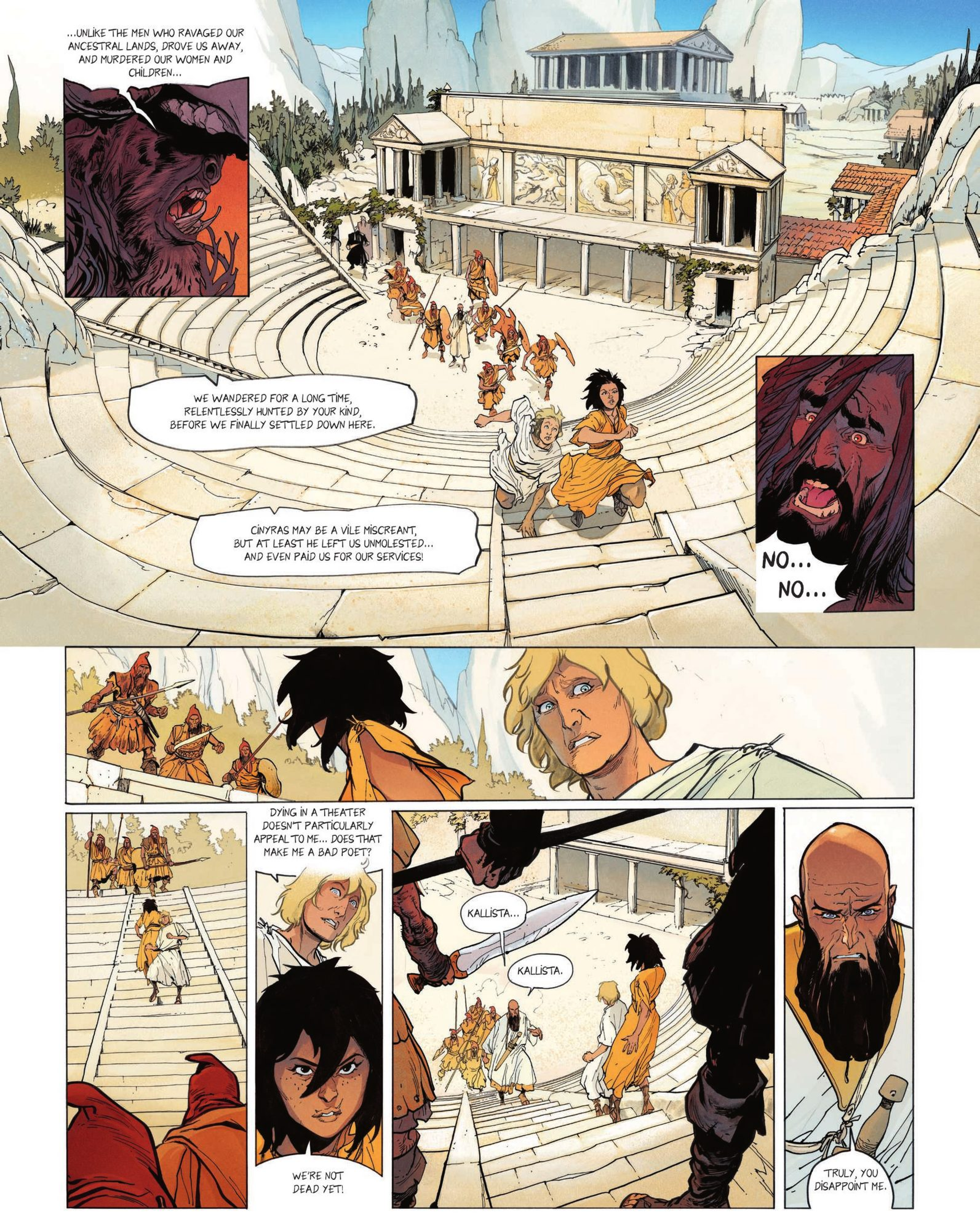

KRAAAK
THERE!!

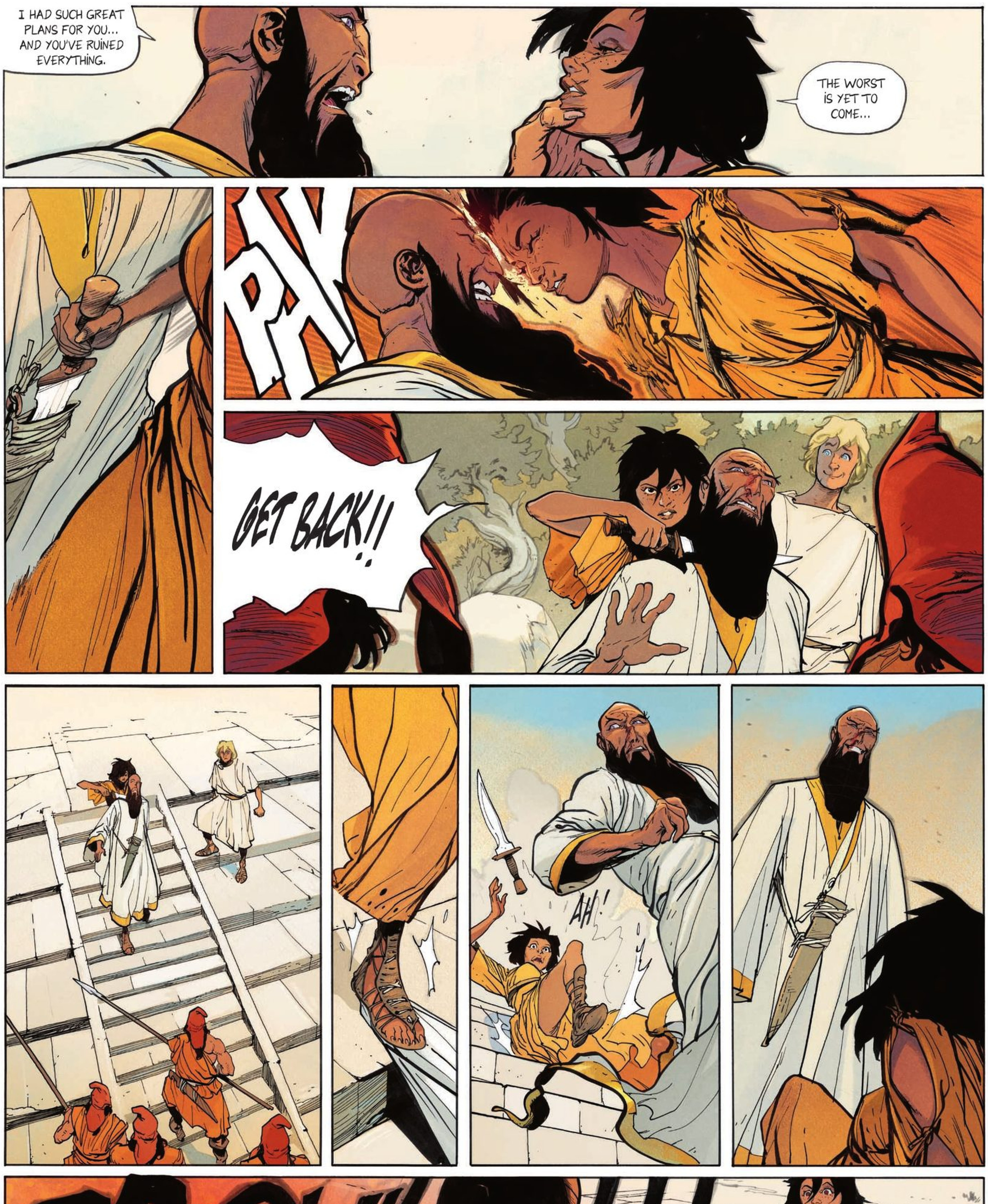

WHO IS THAT?
THAT'S IPHIGENIA. SHE HAS THE GIFT OF CLAIRVOYANCE. THE GUARDS AVOID HER LIKE THE PLAGUE. HER WORDS CAN BE... DISTURBING.
THE GIFT...? WAIT, DON'T ALL OF YOU POSSESS IT? AFTER ALL, THAT'S WHY YOU'RE HERE, ISN'T IT?
FAR FROM IT!
BESIDES IPHIGENIA, NONE OF US HAS ANY GIFT WHATSOEVER.
THAT'S MERELY A PRETENSE TO SEND US HERE.
IN REALITY, CINYRAS TRAINS US TO BECOME COURTESANS BEFORE SELLING US TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER.
AND YOUR FAMILIES... DO THEY KNOW THIS?
OUR FAMILIES ARE THE ONES WHO SENT US HERE!
WE MIGHT NOT HAVE ANY GIFTS, BUT WE ALL MADE THE MISTAKE OF THINKING FOR OURSELVES.
IN MY CASE, I REFUSED ONE OF MY FATHER'S CHOSEN SUITORS. ONE TIME TOO MANY.
AND THE CENTAURS... WHY...
THEY WORK FOR CINYRAS. THEY PROTECT THE SANCTUARY'S RICHES FROM UNWANTED VISITORS AND THE PRIEST'S ENEMIES. AND SOMETIMES, HE ASKS THEM TO GET RID OF ANY STRONG-WILLED GIRLS LIKE ME.
SHIT.

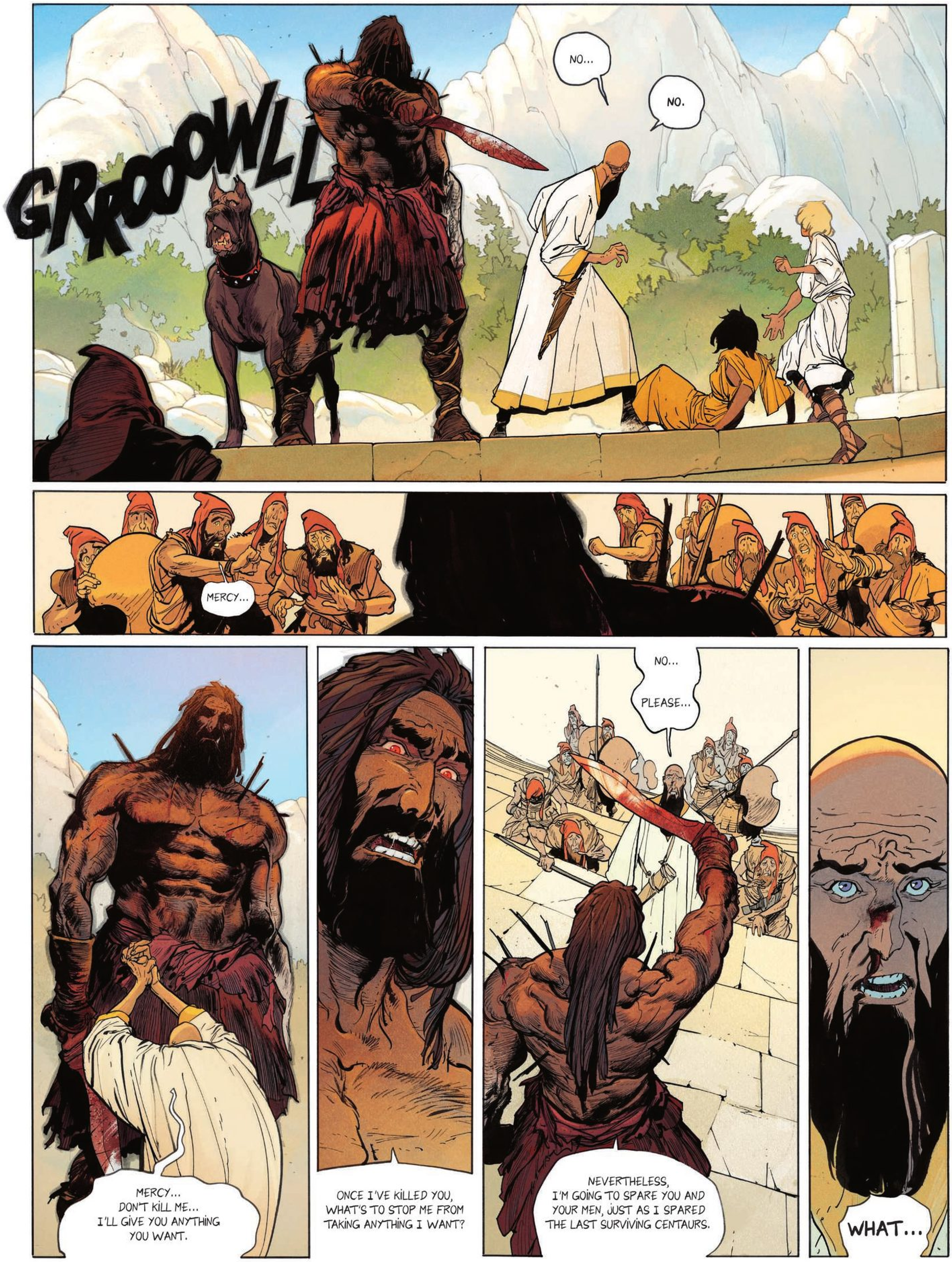

DO YOU WANT TO HELP YOUR FRIEND?!
HUH?
YES.
YES...
WE MUST GO... WE NEED TO TRY TO REACH THE LIFT BEHIND THE THEATER. IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE.
WAIT...

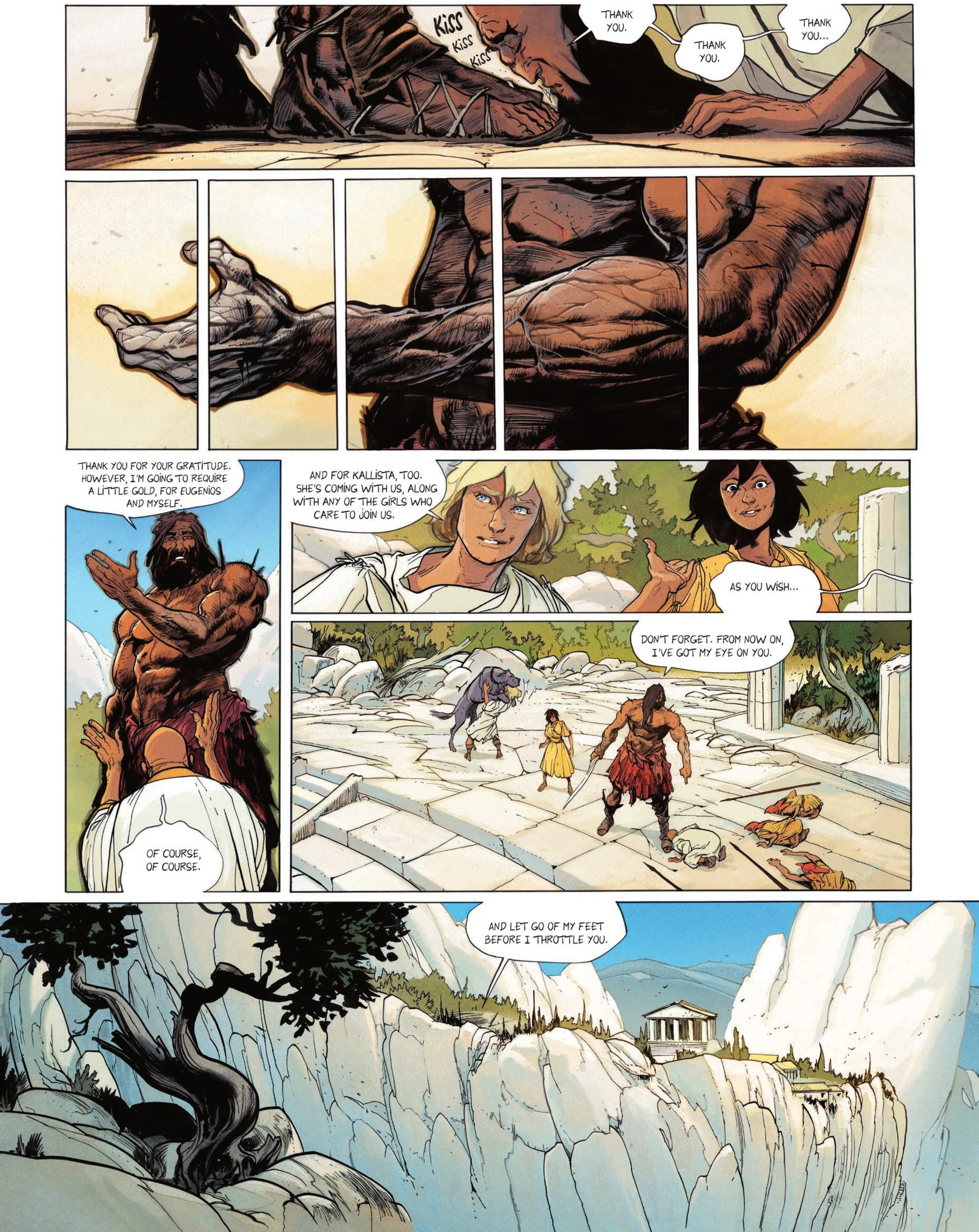

YOUR FRIEND... TELL HIM... TELL HIM IT IS VAIN TO BEG FOR EVERYONE'S GRATITUDE...
...WHEN THE ONLY THANKS THAT MATTER ARE THOSE OF THE GREATEST ONE OF ALL!

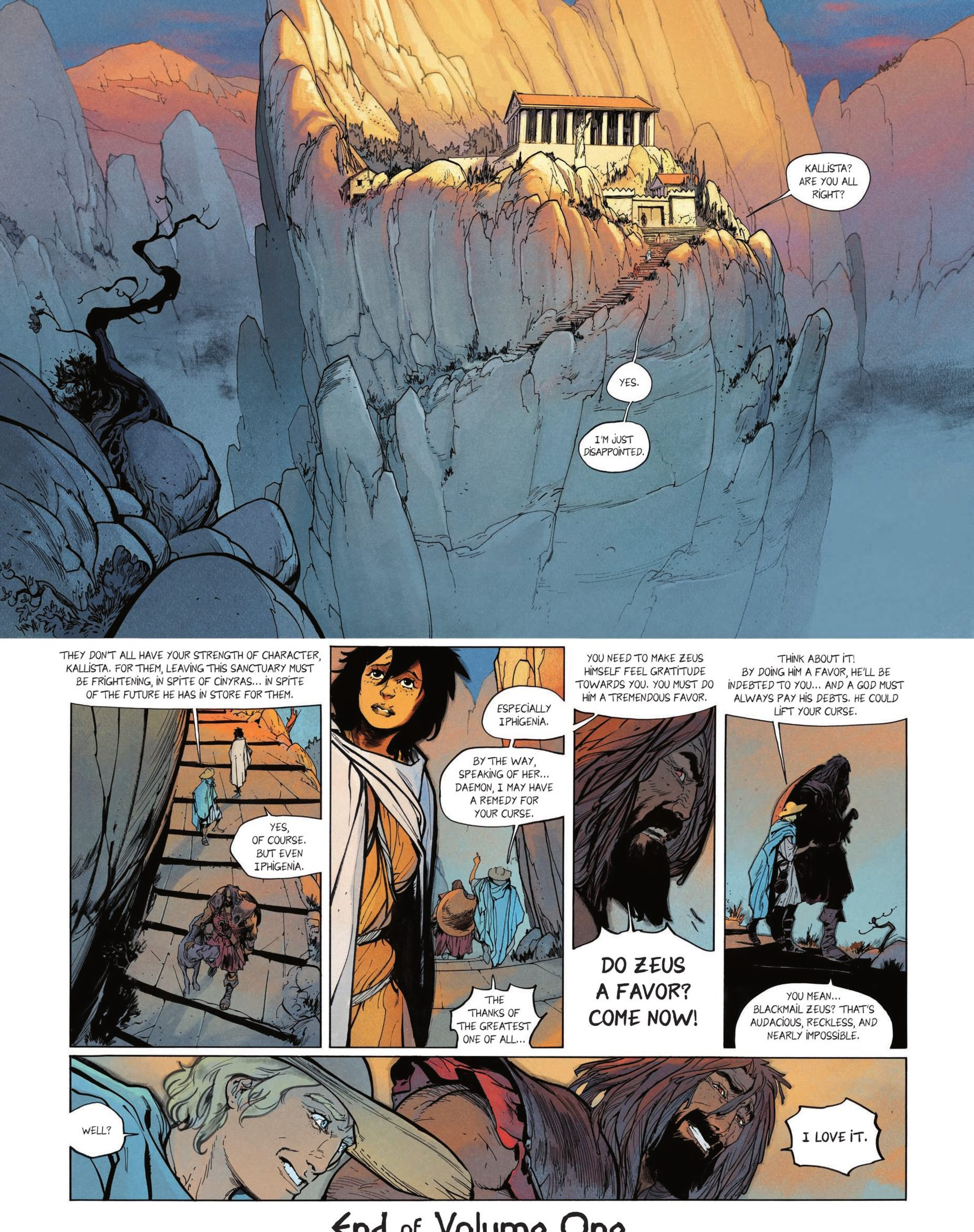

KLA
RA
HAAR
YOU'RE THE LAST ONE. THEN I'LL FINISH OFF THE WOUNDED.
YOU WILL NEVER PLUNDER THIS VALLEY AGAIN.
PLUNDER? WE'VE DONE NOTHING OF THE SORT...


...UNLIKE THE MEN WHO RAVAGED OUR ANCESTRAL LANDS, DROVE US AWAY, AND MURDERED OUR WOMEN AND CHILDREN...
WE WANDERED FOR A LONG TIME, RELENTLESSLY HUNTED BY YOUR KIND, BEFORE WE FINALLY SETTLED DOWN HERE.
CINYRAS MAY BE A VILE MISCREANT, BUT AT LEAST HE LEFT US UNMOLESTED... AND EVEN PAID US FOR OUR SERVICES!
NO... NO...
DYING IN A THEATER DOESN'T PARTICULARLY APPEAL TO ME... DOES THAT MAKE ME A BAD POET?
WE'RE NOT DEAD YET!
KALLISTA...
KALLISTA.
TRULY, YOU DISAPPOINT ME.


I HAD SUCH GREAT PLANS FOR YOU... AND YOU'VE RUINED EVERYTHING.
THE WORST IS YET TO COME...
PAK
GET BACK!!
AH!
GROOWLLLL


GRROOOWLL
NO...
NO.
MERCY...
MERCY... DON'T KILL ME... I'LL GIVE YOU ANYTHING YOU WANT.
ONCE I'VE KILLED YOU, WHAT'S TO STOP ME FROM TAKING ANYTHING I WANT?
NO...
PLEASE...
NEVERTHELESS, I'M GOING TO SPARE YOU AND YOUR MEN, JUST AS I SPARED THE LAST SURVIVING CENTAURS.
WHAT...


KISS KISS KISS
THANK YOU.
THANK YOU.
THANK YOU...
THANK YOU FOR YOUR GRATITUDE. HOWEVER, I'M GOING TO REQUIRE A LITTLE GOLD, FOR EUGENIOS AND MYSELF.
OF COURSE, OF COURSE.
AND FOR KALLISTA, TOO. SHE'S COMING WITH US, ALONG WITH ANY OF THE GIRLS WHO CARE TO JOIN US.
AS YOU WISH...
DON'T FORGET. FROM NOW ON, I'VE GOT MY EYE ON YOU.
AND LET GO OF MY FEET BEFORE I THROTTLE YOU.


KALLISTA? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
YES.
I'M JUST DISAPPOINTED.
THEY DON'T ALL HAVE YOUR STRENGTH OF CHARACTER, KALLISTA. FOR THEM, LEAVING THIS SANCTUARY MUST BE FRIGHTENING, IN SPITE OF CINYRAS… IN SPITE OF THE FUTURE HE HAS IN STORE FOR THEM.
YES, OF COURSE. BUT EVEN IPHIGENIA.
ESPECIALLY IPHIGENIA.
BY THE WAY, SPEAKING OF HER… DAEMON, I MAY HAVE A REMEDY FOR YOUR CURSE.
THE THANKS OF THE GREATEST ONE OF ALL…
YOU NEED TO MAKE ZEUS HIMSELF FEEL GRATITUDE TOWARDS YOU. YOU MUST DO HIM A TREMENDOUS FAVOR.
DO ZEUS A FAVOR? COME NOW!
THINK ABOUT IT! BY DOING HIM A FAVOR, HE'LL BE INDEBTED TO YOU… AND A GOD MUST ALWAYS PAY HIS DEBTS. HE COULD LIFT YOUR CURSE.
YOU MEAN… BLACKMAIL ZEUS? THAT'S AUDACIOUS, RECKLESS, AND NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE.
WELL?
I LOVE IT.

End of Volume One

DAEMON

1

THE VIRGINS OF THESSALY

BRUGEAS - GUILLO - TOULHOAT

SON OF ARES, THE GOD OF WAR,
DAEMON INHERITED COLOSSAL STRENGTH
AND AN UNQUENCHABLE RAGE.
FEARED AND SPURNED BY MEN,
HE BECAME A MERCENARY WITH NO FAITH OR LAW.

UNTIL THE DAY HE WAS CURSED BY ZEUS:
IF HE DOESN'T WANT TO TURN TO MARBLE,
HE MUST NOW EARN THE GRATITUDE
OF THE HUMANS HE DESPISES...